



# TENNYSON'S MORTE D' ARTHUR

BASED ON

TENNYSON'S PASSING OF ARTHUR

BY

PROF. A. C. MUKERJI, M. A.

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION, NOTES AND APPENDICES

BY

N. G. CHATTERJI, B. Sc.



ALLAHABAD  
RAM NARAIN LAL  
PUBLISHER AND BOOKSELLER

1938

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[ Price as. 8



# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## I

### SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF TENNYSON

Tennyson, the greatest English poet of the nineteenth century, was born on the 6th August 1809. He could trace his descent from a family of Tennysons, originally Danish, that had lived in the north of England, and latterly in Lincolnshire. His father, Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was rector of Somersby, a pastoral hamlet in Lincolnshire which Tennyson's immortal genius has immortalised. His mother was a daughter of the vicar of Louth. Early in 1817 he entered Louth Grammar School, and came back home three years later with a bitter experience of English public school life, of which bullying in the playground and flogging in the classroom were the most notable features. He received private instruction at home from his father till 1828 when Tennyson was sent to the University, where he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, which he left three years later. To the teaching of the University, he owed little or nothing, beyond perhaps the Chancellor's gold medal for a poem on *Timbuctoo*. Here he formed an intimate friendship with Arthur Henry Hallam, a friendship which lasted only five years, but of which the memory has been eternalised in his *In Memoriam*. Having now a reputation for *Timbuctoo*, Tennyson ventured before the public with a volume of verse, entitled *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, a book which may be regarded as marking the real commencement of his career as a poet. It came out in London in 1830, and was on the whole well received by the critics who cared to notice it. The friendship between Tennyson and Hallam had become closer when, in 1829, Hallam became engaged to Emily, the poet's second sister. In the summer of 1830 the two friends visited the Continent together, a visit that is memorable as affording to the young poet his first impressions of foreign manners and wild mountain scenery. In February of the next year he was summoned home by his father, who was then in ill-health; in the following March his father was found dead one forenoon in his study chair. The event marks the close of the poet's connection

with Cambridge. An arrangement was made by which the Tennysons lived on at the rectory till 1837. Meanwhile news came from Vienna of the death of his friend Hallam, which occurred in September, 1833, and it seemed after that date as if his poetical instincts had been quenched within him, for he remained silent for nearly ten years. But he was not idle, but continued from time to time to record the various phases of his mind as it passed from blank sorrow to questioning meditation, and thence through hope on to joy ; and these afterwards he wove together and made up what is now " the grandest monumental elegy that literature can show." *In Memoriam* was published in 1850, a year memorable not only in the life of Tennyson the poet, but also in that of Tennyson the man, for the same year came off his marriage, and his appointment as Poet Laureate in succession to Wordsworth. In 1851 the poet settled at Twickenham. As poet laureate he began to show a greater interest in national affairs, and wrote some patriotic songs, among which the most remarkable is the *Ode on the death of the Duke of Wellington*, published in 1852. In November, 1853 he removed to Farringford in the Isle of Wight, meaning to live a country life of earnest work and to see visitors at rare intervals. In 1855 he received the degree of Doctor of Laws from Oxford. The same year he published *Maud*, which many able judges now regard as his most original and representative poem. The first part of the *Idylls of the King*, to which he seriously applied himself in 1856, was published in 1859, and was received almost rapturously throughout the country. *Enoch Arden*, 1862, was perhaps his most popular work : and he used to say that it bought Aldworth, just as *Maud* had enabled him to buy Farringford. He wrote it in about a fortnight and it sold rapidly by tens of thousands. His fame had now grown so much that he became an object of curiosity to pilgrims and tourists, to escape whom he purchased a few acres near Haslemere in 1868, and there built Aldworth, which he used as a summer residence for the rest of his life. In 1870 he began to suffer from gout. In 1873 he visited Windsor Castle at the command of Queen Victoria. The same year Gladstone offered him a baronetcy, and the next year the offer was renewed by Disraeli, and declined on both occasions. He was however prevailed upon by Gladstone to accept a peerage. *27-ey Hall sixty years after* appeared in 1886, and *Crossing*

*the Bar* was written in his eightieth year. In 1890, though ill, he was projecting new poems, and inventing new metres. In 1892 his poetic vigour left him, and the end came on the 6th of October of that year.

## II CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS

Of the life of Tennyson we are in possession of the minutest details, thanks to the labours of his eldest son, the present Lord Tennyson. And yet the fact remains true that the biography, with all its accuracy and its fulness of detail, supplies nothing which would help or hinder our appreciation of his work ; for the poems of Tennyson are probably a better biography than ever could be written. The events of his life seldom stand in vital relation to his poems, except in the case of the loss of Hallam. His thoughts seldom sprang from the outward facts of his life : they had a source deeper in the inward man, and the inward man is a far more interesting study than the outward person.

Let us then glance at this inward man as revealed to us in his writings. There is a general impression among men that there must be, in the life of a poet, something mysterious, something uncommon, something essentially different from the life of an ordinary man, as though the poet were anthropologically a separate class of being. The poet, men think, must have strange likes and dislikes, be subject to wild freaks in conduct, curious idiosyncracies, in thought, and strange eccentricities in behaviour. No poet diverges more widely from this popular standard than Tennyson. There is nothing irregular or wayward in the life of Tennyson : all is orderly, methodical and normal. Like any other human being he had likes and dislikes of his own, characteristic peculiarities of character, personal traits of individuality. We shall try to note some of the most important of these.

The most prominent point in the character of Tennyson was his sincerity, which was the key-note of all his utterances, and the mainspring of all his conduct. He detested nothing more strongly than affectation, which was so alien to his nature that he spoke and acted exactly as he felt and thought, everywhere and about everything. It was this sincerity of his character that drew forth from Carlyle that emphatic tribute—"a true human soul to whom your soul can say Brother."

Next to this sincerity is the childlike simplicity which, coupled with a manly loftiness, made him a sort of ideal man. He was shy, sensitive, and inclined to seclusion, partly owing to extreme shortsight, partly out of his own nature, but partly too on account of literary exigencies, and later on account of literary eminence. He dreaded miscellaneous company, and was at his ease only when in the midst of a few select friends.

His mental vision was exceedingly sharp and penetrating, as though to make up for his defective eyesight. He could read a man's character through and through in a flash, merely from a glance at his face, and he was seldom incorrect in his judgment. Mr. James Knowles, editor of the *Nineteenth Century and After*, tells us how once as Tennyson was travelling by rail, a certain well-dressed gentleman entered his compartment, and the very first sight of him convinced the poet that the man was a great rogue. On inquiry it was ascertained that he was a man of considerable position, who enjoyed much popular esteem, being the head of some important business concern; but still Tennyson could not shake off the prepossession that he must be a rogue. Some years afterwards the same man turned out to be a swindler, who ran away with the money of a number of honest people who had trusted themselves into his hands.

His heart was always full of tenderness, and a more kind-hearted man could not easily be found. As poet he was imbued with the deepest feeling for all humanity, with whom he rejoiced and with whom he wept. But his judgment of men was sometimes terrible in proportion to its usual tenderness. Nevertheless he seldom carried beyond words his anger even with those who had gravely injured him.

Yet he was not without foibles, for what man is? Such was his extraordinary fear of criticism, which made him very nervous and sometimes diffident of his own powers. And his nature "was not without contrasts; mystic broodings would struggle with strong common-sense, and hollow shows with a turn of mind essentially practical and virile. For all his moral rectitude there was in him a leaning towards melancholy, and darkness and sadness contended in his soul with a passion for the light and joy."

So much for Tennyson the man. Let us now observe the poet. Tennyson the man, and Tennyson the poet were the same,

not merely in essence but also in every little detail, for as has been mentioned above, the dominant trait of his character was sincerity, and it is this sincerity which gives their value to Tennyson's poetic utterances.

One of the most powerful influences which moulded Tennyson's thought, life, and work was religion. He was essentially a religious poet. This does not mean that all his writings are interspersed with religious sentiments like a clergyman's sermon, or that they embody religious dogmas and theological controversies. Far from it. It is difficult to find even a formulated creed in his works. All that is therefore meant in saying that Tennyson was essentially a religious poet is that the religious *spirit* pervades all that he has written. This spirit varied with the nature of the subject. If in any one of his poems we find a Puritanic touch, we should not rush to the inference that Tennyson's creed was Puritanism; so likewise if we find evidences of a pantheistic colouring in any of his lines, we should not jump upon the conclusion that Tennyson's faith was Pantheism. The fact is that Tennyson as poet had no church creed: his poetical faith cannot be enunciated by any *ism*.

This absence of all logical definition of his creed in his poetry renders his poetry all the better art, because the domain of art is the illimitable, the indefinable, the infinite. Art, if it stoops to petty propagandism, is not art, the true province of which is love and beauty, joy and hope and veneration.

Tennyson's was a religion of inquiry. What he said of his friend Hallam—

“ He fought his doubts, and gathered strength ;  
He would not make his judgment blind,  
He faced the spectres of the mind  
And laid them ; thus he came at length  
To find a stronger faith his own.”

—was true of himself as also of the highest philosophic minds of his time, which was an age of transition in all departments. Tennyson's, therefore, was a religion of transition, and it may be best described—if it is possible to reduce it to a simple formula at all—in his own words as a “ clinging to faith beyond the forms of faith.”

But though there is no formal enunciation of his faith in his poems, there are sufficient indications of his main beliefs concerning the relations of God to man and to the universe, and the end to which God was leading them. These he treated as matters of faith, not subjects for the understanding, and thus brought them within the sphere of poetry by connecting them with the emotions. It is not difficult to discover these beliefs in his pages; they were—the faith that God manifests himself in the universe as Will and Love; faith in the brotherhood of man; faith in the evolution of the human race into perfect love and goodness; faith in the vitality of the present. Along with these faiths we find in Tennyson a strong faith in the personality of God, and of Christ, of whom he says—

‘Strong son of God, Immortal Love,  
Whom we that have not seen thy face,  
By faith and faith alone embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove.’

No poet who lives in an era of change and progress can keep himself entirely aloof from the busy activity around him. As a man of the nineteenth century he had to take some interest in nineteenth century movements, but his interest is always speculative and philosophical, not practical. Yet he had to write of patriotism, of the true conception of freedom, of the condition of the poor, of the woman's place in society. But like his religious opinions, his political and social views “tended to a compromise”; he believed in progress, and if he did not keep pace with the forward movements of the day, he did not always distrust them.

His great reverence for the past is a notable feature of his social and political views. This is also the basis of his patriotism.

‘Love thou thy land, with love far-brought  
From out the storied Past, and used  
Within the Present, but transfused  
Through future time by power of thought.’

But this patriotism was of a characteristic kind. It chiefly consisted in celebrating the martial prowess of England by land and sea over other nations, not in tracing the development of civic liberty through struggles with autocratic powers. Democratic movements did not find much favour with Tennyson, who was a

thoroughgoing aristocrat and had a fund of comic contempt for "the many-headed beast, the mob." His patriotism also showed itself in dwelling upon the noble traits of pure English character, in the course of which he was often led into narrow extremes of opinion. For example, he was fond of pouring contempt upon France, the natural enemy of Britain. Hence he never widened the circle of patriotism so as to embrace the whole human race: "he never became international"

His idea of Freedom likewise had its bounds. His freedom was "not the schoolboy heat, the blind hysterics of the Celt," but—

" Freedom slowly broadening down  
From precedent to precedent."

He was no less a conservative than an aristocrat; he was opposed to all violent changes, all rash measures, and advocated a cautious, gradual process of change restricted only to the necessary parts of an institution:

" So let the change which comes be free  
To ingroove itself with that which flies,  
And work, a joint of state, that plies  
Its office, moved with sympathy."

Tennyson has said very little about the condition of the poor. Indeed it seems that he never felt it. He had only a vague perception of their misery as arising out of the keen competition he witnessed all around.

With regard to woman's rank in society, Tennyson, while fully admitting their claim to a more liberal education and certain other social rights so long withheld, would nevertheless refer them to a position of subjection and inferiority. This comes partly of the respect for precedent and tradition which formed a strong element of his political views. His attitude towards the woman's position in the social scale is summed up in the following lines of the *Princess*:—

" The woman's cause is man's : they rise or sink  
- Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free."

## III

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TENNYSON'S  
POETRY

The study of a poet may proceed along two distinct lines—the study of his form, and the study of his matter. We may either restrict our field of study to his art or to his truths, to the beauties of workmanship by which he shapes the truths he has to teach, or to those truths themselves. In the case of Tennyson both of these courses present interesting and instructive subjects of study, and this is the mark of a first rate poet. For the best poetry is beautiful not only in form but also in matter, not only in language but also in thought. The subject must be some truth of everlasting interest, whether morally or merely emotionally—intellectual truth, as such, being beyond the sphere of poetry.

**1. Simplicity.**—The first characteristic of Tennyson's poetry is simplicity, which is noticeable not only in the choice of his subjects but also in the manner of his execution. He scrupulously avoided themes of an abstruse nature which make simple treatment impossible. In language, in style, in arrangement, he always preserved the truest simplicity. Not that he rejected all figures of speech, or chose vulgar forms of expression, or arranged the parts, in a haphazard way ; on the contrary, he was fond of ornament, he carefully avoided commonplace words and phrases, and planned out his poems with perfect symmetry and order. For simplicity is not inconsistent with ornament, nor does it preclude the use of learned forms of expression : the opposite of simplicity is not ornamentation, but complexity, ambiguity, abstruseness.

**2. Spontaneity.**—This simplicity gave to his poems the quality of natural ease and spontaneity, without which no poetry is poetry. Labourled productions lack that true ring of song, which causes the true singer's melodies to penetrate the regions of the heart more effectively than the sublimest thoughts of any other speaker or writer. He has himself told us :

" I do but sing because I must,  
And pipe but as the linnets sing."

This is the criterion of true poetry, which has also something of the inevitable about it. Tennyson's primary impulse of expression was to seize upon the innate suggestive power of words, and

not to rely upon the logical power of the sentence—the reverse of what it was in the case of Matthew Arnold, who, for that reason, is denied the title of poet by many critics.

**3. Clearness.**—The next characteristic of Tennyson's poetry is clearness, no doubt a result of his simplicity and spontaneity. His thoughts are never obscure, never intricate or jumbled together confusedly ; his meaning is never ambiguous or uncertain ; his picture never blurred or blotted ; his purposes never unsure or wavering. To attain and preserve this clearness the poet carefully abstained from handling profound philosophical problems : he never tried to deal with the dreadful and involved passions of humanity ; he never admitted sharp controversial themes. Such subjects, besides their inherent difficulty of treatment, present the added difficulty of being unpoetic. The legitimate function of poetry is to treat of truths which concern all mankind, and are free from all sectional narrowness ; that are of lasting value, and not merely of ephemeral interest ; that ennoble the heart, lift it up to a higher level, and not drag it down to depths of controversy that are always a "vortex amidst vortices."

**4. Uniform excellence.**—The uniform excellence of Tennyson's poems is another special feature, and this is perhaps their most obvious characteristic. The reader who makes his first acquaintance with Tennyson's writings feels constrained to burst out, "This is very good," and this impression becomes more and more strengthened as the acquaintance grows more intimate. Not that everything that his pen traced is equally good : that is not so even with Shakespeare. Genius has its ebbs and flows, for genius after all is human. What is meant by uniform excellence is that the art is of invariable beauty in all his poems ; the spirit or the matter could not be of unchanging quality throughout.

**5. Dignity.**—There is also in all Tennyson's writings a dignity which is truly Miltonic. For Tennyson, like Milton, believed himself to be a prophet whose solemn vocation was to proclaim truth and beauty in the world, to cheer the heart, to lift the spirit of man. This dignity is consciously kept in view throughout his work, not in any offensive, obtrusive way, but purely out of a feeling of self-respect. The spirit of Duty, of Honour, and of Reverence for all that is good and true animates all his poems.

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power,  
Yet not for power (power of herself  
Would come uncalled for), but to live by law,  
Acting the law we live by without fear :  
And, because right is right, to follow right  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence."

6. **Love of beauty.**—As a result of this self-reverence his work reveals his faithfulness to beauty. The test of a true poet is the love of beauty, whether that beauty is moral, religious, or emotional. Each poet has his own way of representing beauty, which is far from being of a stereotyped model, and this way or method is called his art. The test of beauty is that it gives rise to feelings of joy or reverence in contemplation, that it creates in the heart the desire to reproduce it, to share it with others. It is not the skilful *representation* wherein the art consists, but the *beauty* which is thus represented ; so that even the most skilful representation of the ugly (which, according to the above test of beauty, would be that which awakens the feelings of hatred, or horror, or any other such feeling) would not be art. In Tennyson beauty shines out everywhere. He had not the heart to approach anything that was impure, untrue or unjust ; he could never bend his art to pander to low desires, base feelings, or depraved tastes ; he could never prostitute his Muse. Even to the very last he wrote only of what was worthy of love, of noble pleasure, or heart-felt adoration, and this is the secret of the invincible charm that pervades his poems.

7. **Inventiveness.**—The whole of Tennyson's poetry, ranging from the simplest ballad to the loftiest epic, reveals the further characteristic of great inventive power. Every one of his works possesses the unmistakable stamp of originality, which is one of the essentials of a true artist. For neither the love of beauty, nor the power of representing it would of itself make an artist : there must be in his work something peculiarly his own, the stamp of individuality, which is one of the chief tests of genius. The originality in Tennyson does not consist in exploring undiscovered regions of thought, but in newness of treatment. Tennyson built with material that was already shaped, and lay ready to his hand. His inspiration came from the past ; he was of the order of those poets who sum up, who bring to an end, the tendencies of

thought, rather than of those who pioneer in untilled poetic territory.

**8. Attitude towards Nature.**—Tennyson's deep knowledge of nature and the varied uses he put it to is another remarkable feature of his poems. No other poet has brought to his work such a naturalist's powers of minute observation, an endowment of knowledge so wide and so accurate in detail as almost to border on scientific precision. His descriptions are as true as those of a naturalist. The epithets he employs to describe natural objects are not mere conventionalities nor used solely for ornamentation, but are intended for a classification as true as that of the man of science.

There are generally three classes of Nature poets—(1) those who treat Nature simply as the background of the human story ; (2) those upon whom Nature produces a sort of ecstasy resulting in a kind of idolatrous hymn to her glory rather than in a vivid picture of her features ; (3) those whose impulse is simply to paint the features of Nature in every detail of their beauty, and who use the human story merely as an instrument for an objective representation of Nature. Tennyson belongs exclusively to no one of these groups. Though his deep knowledge of Nature prevented him from looking upon her as nothing more than the background of the human story, his artistic instinct was so true and so sure that in his narratives he is careful never to let the movement of the reader's imagination be arrested by the unnecessary obtrusion of landscape, however beautiful. He shows also nothing of the rapturous love of nature which characterized Shelley so eminently. It is as a painter of the beauties of Nature that Tennyson was a Nature poet. In describing the outline of a landscape Tennyson allows himself a freedom of composition unknown to the best of Nature-poets. It is this which lends that brilliance to his pictures which is one of their chief characteristics. So masterly is his hand in painting Nature that it is very difficult to say what kind of landscape he paints best. In the power of calling up imaginary landscape he never had an equal among English poets.

**9. Humour.**—The next point to notice about Tennyson's poetry is his humour. Poetry and humour seem at first sight to have no very conspicuous affinities with each other. In their

highest form both are not to be found together ; it requires a spacious genius to take both in. Life to the humorist is as a rule almost the exact opposite of what it appears to the poet. The same object has often indeed both a poetic and humorous aspect ; hence humour in poetry is not a contradiction in terms.

A critic says of Tennyson that he was absolutely devoid of humour. This is no doubt true in one sense, for he had not that kind of airy wit which enables its possessor to triumph over the triviality of his subject. He had unquestionably no striking command over that instrument of playful verse which Moore for instance touched with such exquisite effect. But Tennyson *could* trifle in the sense of treating a purely fanciful subject with admirable lightness of fanciful humour. Humour, rich and full-bodied, but no more wanting, on that account, in subtlety and distinction of flavour, abounded in Tennyson's view of life and mankind. But it was always of a sympathetic kind ; he had no gift of mockery, absolutely none—" he is a Juvenal always, a Horace never "

**10. Style.**—Tennyson's style is unique. " No one is more keenly alive to the difficulty of expression in ' matter-moulded forms of speech ' ; but few have so effectually subdued this stubborn medium of language to their will. Tennyson has set a new standard of perfection in technical excellence ; his own art is so perfect that we, simply as readers, rarely notice or think about it at all—when every word seems just what it should be, we are led along in happy unconsciousness of effort, and are even apt to be a little blinded to the power of his work by its faultless execution. Yet Tennyson never for a moment sacrifices meaning to sensuous effect ; indeed, his assured hand is shown quite as much in reticence as in his employment of the words and images that go to produce the felicitous result. But his instinct for words of which not only the sound, but the associations help the thought, though quite unobtrusively, enables him to communicate subtleties of meaning, moods of impalpable delicacy, such as in the hands of a smaller genius must have remained amongst the ' fancies that broke through language and escaped ', and to clothe in noble and appealing forms ideas or feelings widely shared with him by others. As Lowell has justly observed—

" Though old the thought and oft expresst,

' Tis his at last who says it best ' ;

and for us Tennyson has said many things best.

**II. Versification**—A few words about Tennyson's versification remain to be said. His choice or invention of metres is always happy. Close examination of the distribution of pauses, accents, alliteration, exhibits the poet's technical skill, but through and beyond all this there remains the indefinable something, not to be analysed or described, but only *felt*. Even the old-established English metre, the ten-syllabled blank verse, takes a new character as Tennyson shapes it to his purpose. His blank verse is unique in that it is more strained and yet more free than that of any other poet—more strained, because he did not take liberties with his lines ; more free, because his sounds are richer and more varied than those of other poets. He is nevertheless always regular ; he never unnecessarily increases syllables, nor shifts the cæsura, as Milton for example does. He has also very few "run on" or unstopped lines, and where he has them he employs them for very especial reasons. As a vehicle of thought and emotion his verse is entirely at his command. It has, at his choice, ease and rapidity, or slow and stately movement, or it echoes in its sound the thought, the scene, or the thing. It is by turns loud or low, soft or rough in spirit, fluid or rigid, abrupt, lingering, smooth, continuous, interrupted, weighty or light. Lastly, it is extraordinarily concise—almost to a fault. It sometimes becomes too bald ; its tricks are sometimes too obvious, and too often repeated : it often lacks a rushing movement ; and it is always a little too academic in tone.

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE IDYLLS OF THE KING

1. **History of Publication.**—The *Idylls of the King*, one of Tennyson's greatest works, is a series of narrative and descriptive poems, twelve in number, with King Arthur, the knights of the Round Table, and the Ladies of the court, as characters. The first issue of this series appeared in 1859 and contained the four idylls of *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*. The remaining ones were published at intervals between 1869 and 1886. One volume, containing *the Holy Grail*, *the Coming of Arthur*, *Pelleas and Ettarre* and *the Passing of Arthur*, appeared in 1869, the last being only an enlargement of an earlier poem called *Morte d'Arthur*, published in 1842 and subsequently incorporated in the larger poem. The *Last Tournament* appeared in 1872; *Balin and Balan* was added in 1886, when finally the whole was arranged in a series, with the 'Coming of Arthur' forming the introduction, and the 'Passing of Arthur' the conclusion.

2. **Source of the 'Idylls.'**—Tennyson has borrowed the materials of his story from Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, printed by William Caxton in 1485. Malory himself found his materials in works of an earlier date, such as the lays of the Welsh bards, the writings of Nennius, popularly supposed to have been a writer of the seventh century, and especially the chronicles of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was consecrated Bishop of St. Asaph in 1152. Geoffrey's version again is, according to his own words, "compiled from a certain very ancient book in the British tongue." The real origin, therefore, of the Arthurian story is lost in the mists of remote tradition. The Arthurian cycle of romance had its origin in hoary antiquity, its germ in ancient Celtic tradition, and after undergoing many and important variations, and receiving accretions from various sources, it passed, mainly through the version of Geoffrey of Monmouth, into the hands of the French *trouvères* and German *minnesingers*, and returned again to England to find its way into ballad literature, and eventually into the *Morte d'Arthur* of Malory and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.

Tennyson borrowed materials only to cast them into a new shape and present them in a fresher, more beautiful form. While preserving the framework of the original romance he has completely re-modelled the story. In spite of their antique garb, Tennyson's characters think, speak, and act in the spirit of the nineteenth century rather than that of the fifth, in which they must be imagined to have lived. He has imbued the old with new life and spirit, interpreted it by a Christian insight, and applied its ancient lessons to the complex conditions of modern life and thought.

3. **Why he chose such a subject**—Among others probably, some of the reasons why Tennyson chose King Arthur as the subject of his greatest poem may be easily stated. First of all, he had a natural bent towards romantic allegory. Then in the Arthurian legends there was a vast field of poetry which was wholly unworked. Lastly, the subject possessed a national value—Arthur was a British king. The subject had been in the poet's mind almost from his boyhood. He once said to Mr. Ruchie: "At twenty-four I meant to write an epic or a drama of King Arthur, and I thought that I should take twenty years about the work." A similar remark was made by the poet to Mr. Knowles: "I said I should do it in twenty years, but the 'Reviews' stopped me."

4. **The name 'Idylls'**.—The word 'idyll' originally meant 'a little picture,' and thence came to be applied to a short picturesque poem, generally of a pastoral kind. The meaning of the term has however been extended by Tennyson, so as apparently to include all picturesque narrative poems of moderate length, whatever their subject may be; and its application to his Arthurian story serves chiefly to express the fact that in this work the subject is dealt with in a series of small poems, each complete in itself, and generally without naturally leading on from one to another. At the same time the poem forms an artistic whole, and the narrative flows on uninterrupted from the first idyll to the last with sufficient regularity. There is also a real unity of conception, and of moral ideals that make the poem a complete whole.

5 **Outline of the Story**—In the *Coming of Arthur* we have an account of Arthur's mystic birth—"from the great deep."  
M.—2.

to the great deep he goes'—, of his marriage with Guinevere, daughter of king Leodogran of Cameliard, of the foundation of the Round Table, of Arthur's victories over Rome and the heathen.

*Gareth and Lynette* is the history of a young aspirant to knighthood in the new and happy time. As yet there is no sin.

In the *Marriage of Geraint* and *Geraint and Enid* the evil first begins its deadly work and a rumour of Guinevere's love for Lancelot makes Geraint suspicious of his own wife. But as yet the poison does not spread far.

In *Bulin and Balan* the rumours spread apace; and owing to loss of faith in their queen, two brothers go to their death.

Next, the vows of the knights are loosened, and *Vivien* becomes possible. Even Merlin is powerless against the seduction of the flesh.

To the guilt of *Lancelot* and Guinevere a simple loving heart (that of Elaine) must be sacrificed.

*The Holy Grail*—is both a test and a forlorn hope. The quest of the Grail seemed to the knights a call from highest heaven, but the clear-sighted Arthur discerns in it the presage of a coming disaster to the Round Table.

*Palleas and Ettarre*—is a contrast to *Gareth and Lynette*. The career of a young knight is blighted by the breath of corruption.

*The Last Tournament*—shows us the complete triumph of the flesh, though it is partly relieved by the faithfulness of Dagonet, the fool, even to the bitter close.

*In Guinevere*—the whole kingdom falls in ruin. The Queen's self-abasement in the nunnery at Almesbury, her tardy repentance and remorseful shame, the utter conquest of her love, which Arthur at last achieves in the very crisis of his defeat, attest the king's greatness, and the grandeur of his aims, no less eloquently than his own self-mastery in the blighting of his love, the desecration of his ideals, and the destruction of his purposes.

In the *Passing of Arthur*—we have the last battle and Arthur's mysterious doom. But the mission of the saintly king has not been in vain; he has lived his life, an example.

6. **Allegorical Significance of the 'Idylls'.**—The story of the 'Idylls' has a definite moral aim, though the Poem cannot be called an allegory, for the characters are men and women, and not personified attributes. It has a spiritual meaning from beginning to end. As Tennyson says in the concluding lines 'To the Queen,' the poem is an

"old imperfect tale,  
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,  
Ideal manhood closed in real man."

"In this great epic we have the story of the rise and fall of a kingdom based on righteousness. In the temporary subjugation of force and evil passion to a will strong and holy; in the slipping away from a yoke too noble to be long endured by natures of a base mould; in the overthrow amidst gloom and confusion of the high rule; in the securing utter failure, which is yet nowhere accepted as final failure, there is placed before us a spiritual problem of profound interest both in itself and in the way it is handled."

The whole is an allegory of the soul of man warring with sense and passing on its way from life to death and through death to resurrection. Arthur stands for the rational soul; his kingdom represents the rule of conscience or righteousness; Merlin, who educated him, stands for intellectual power. Guinevere is the heart; her marriage with Arthur represents the fact that the soul must be joined with the heart before it can do its work. The knights of the Round Table typify the high faculties of man. The three Queens represent Faith, Hope and Charity, the three cardinal Christian virtues. The Lady of the Lake is religion. Excalibur is the sword of the spirit with which it is to fight against sense. Excalibur is taken back by the Lady of the Lake that it may equip the king in the other world, for the life and energy of the soul do not end when it passes from earth.

But the allegory is always hidden beneath the story.

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# INTRODUCTION TO 'MORTE D' ARTHUR'

## I.

### CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE POEM

Morte d'Arthur is the original poem written by Tennyson before he had any intention of writing the series of poems entitled 'Idylls of the King.' It contains an account of the death of King Arthur, or rather his passing away, for it is said that Arthur will return to rule once more. The poem was subsequently incorporated in 'The Passing of Arthur', the last of the above series of poems.

King Arthur was a legendary king of Britain, who is supposed by romanticists to have flourished in the 5th century. The legends relating to Arthur are of very ancient date, but Tennyson borrowed the materials from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, which is for the modern reader the best known store-house of Arthurian legends. He pretends however that his authority for the facts connected with Arthur's death is Sir Bedivere, 'the first made and latest left of all his knights,' who remained faithful to the king up to the last.

The opening line of the poem—

'So all day long the noise of battle rolled'

is rather an abrupt beginning. Without giving any details of the battle, we are at once brought to the very end of it and find King Arthur mortally wounded. The battle here alluded to was fought between Arthur and his nephew Modred, who had raised a revolt against his uncle while the latter was absent in the north. The queen, Guinevere, had fallen in love with Lancelot, one of the knights of the Round Table, and had fled with him to the north. King Arthur marched north to chastise the offending knight; thereupon the queen fled to hiding at the nunnery of Almesbury. During the king's absence, Modred raised a revolt and had himself crowned king. The king then hastened to subdue the revolt and pursued Modred to the west coast.

The unfaithfulness of the Queen, the guilt of Lancelot, the treachery of Modred, made a very sad impression on the mind of Arthur, and he goes to the battle half-heartedly. He was naturally in a bitter mood of mind, and felt his trust in the beneficence of Providence a little shaken. The horrifying scene that met the king's eyes as he glanced across the battle-field serves to deepen the gloom of his mind still further; but he is consoled by Bedivere and roused to action, when the latter reminds him that his chief enemy, his treacherous kinsman, Modred, is still unhurt. He then follows the suggestion of Bedivere, and strikes Modred dead, the last time he used his famous sword Excalibur, for he himself fell mortally wounded by Modred just after.

Seeing that the wound was indeed mortal, Bedivere carried the king to a neighbouring chapel, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on one side and by a large lake on the other. This was done evidently that the king might breathe his last on holy ground, and probably to emblem forth the fact that with the death of Arthur died the cause of Christianity in Britain. As he lies dying in the chapel, his thoughts go back to the happy past; he thinks of the days when his chief recreation consisted in walking about the gardens and the halls of Camelot in the company of his brave knights, and talking of knightly exploits; he cannot shake off the belief he has expressed so many times before, that his own knights have been the cause of his ruin:

‘I perish by this people which I made.’

Doubt and disbelief reign supreme in his mind; he attaches little faith to Merlin's prophecy about his second incarnation and his second rule on earth; he grows utterly indifferent to the future in his solicitude about his present condition, about which he entertains no doubt—

‘That without help I cannot last till morn.’

He is anxious for the restoration of Excalibur to the lady of the Lake, from whom he had got the sword, and he reminds Bedivere of the way in which he had obtained it. The first thing that should be done is that the sword is to be thrown into the lake, and Bedivere is to come back and report what he sees or hears after the execution of the mission. One faint gleam of hope seems doubtfully to shine through the dark atmosphere of doubt and gloom that encompassed him; he has always worn the

sword "like a king," and wheresoever he is sung or told in after-time his sword will be celebrated along with him.

Bedivere's simple devotion fails to understand the urgency of the task of throwing the sword when the more urgent duty of watching the wounded king already claimed his attention :

"It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,  
Aidle, alone, and smitten through the helm—  
A little thing may harm a wounded man ; "

Soon, however, a wicked thought arises in his mind and he consents to go, for suddenly the thought struck him that he could easily retain possession of the sword himself without being detected. He accordingly goes to the margin of the lake, draws the sword out of the sheath, and feels tempted to steal it by the sight of the brilliant gems with which the hilt was studded. He leaves Excalibur there concealed among the waterflags that grew on the margin of the lake, and goes back to the king and reports that he has seen nothing except the waters of the lake striking against the shores. Arthur knew that the same mysterious arm, from which he had obtained the gift of the sword, would appear again above the surface of the lake and take back the sword. He therefore could easily see through Bedivere's falsehood, and he chides him severely for his attempted deception :

"Thou hast betrayed thy nature and thy name,  
Not rendering true answer, as be seemed  
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight."

Yet he readily pardons the knight for his first act of disobedience and commands him to go again. He goes again, ponders long over the matter, and tries to persuade himself of the rightness of his conduct in a long chain of arguments like those with which men often delude themselves into wicked courses. He cannot find one good purpose which will result from such an unnecessary waste, nor can he discover one evil consequence that will follow it. He well understands the force of the truth that disobedience of the king is detrimental to good government, but he questions if obedience is obligatory in all cases. He thinks not,—for instance, in this case no one is bound to obey the king in a matter which results in no good either to himself or to any one else. Moreover he suspects that the order has been given in a state of delirium or such other state when the king was incapable of realizing the full consequences of the execution. He is thus

convinced that there is no harm in keeping back the sword. Nay, he believes such an act will tend to positive good. The sword, if preserved, will remain as a material and palpable relic without which Arthur's future glory will be only incomplete :

“ What record, or what relic of my lord  
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
And rumours of a doubt ? ”

He is thus completely “ clouded with his own conceit,” and hiding Excalibur again, goes and tells the king the same lie. Arthur naturally falls into a rage and reprimands the knavish knight still more strongly, calling him ‘ miserable, unkind, untrue, unknighly, traitor-hearted ’ ; not, of course, without a sad reflection on his own helpless condition :

“ Woe is me !  
Authority forgets a dying king,  
Laid widowed of the power in his eye  
That bowed the will.”

But though authority had deserted the king in his last moments, that greatness of mind, that largeness of soul which, on a different occasion and for a different offender, had dictated those noble words of forgiveness—

‘ And lo ! I forgive thee  
As eternal God forgives.’

—yes, that kingly magnanimity still remained with him, and he pardoned Bedivere a second time, but warned him that if he spared to fling Excalibur, he would arise and slay the knight with his hands. What a noble picture of kingly high-mindedness and human indignation do we have here !

Bedivere's better sense returns, and he goes and throws away the sword. As it darts through the air, it makes a huge curve of light and sparkles brilliantly in the moonlight. The description of the fall of Excalibur is a most vivid and glowing description associated as it has been by similitude with one of nature's grandest phenomena—the *Aurora Borealis*. As Arthur had expected, the mysterious arm of the Lady of the Lake appeared above the water and caught the sword and vanished with it, the sword too thus fulfilling Merlin's prophecy about the hero—

‘ From the great deep to the great deep he goes.’

Bedivere returns to the king, who is clearly able to infer from his looks that the task was done, and yet he wants to satisfy himself that the sword has indeed been restored to the Lady of the Lake. He hears with obvious interest Bedivere's faithful account of all that has transpired on the margin of the lake. His one anxiety was thus over. But there was another that made him equally uneasy. He knew that a boat must be waiting to carry him to his resting-place, and he was eager to be taken to the margin of the lake to meet the spirits that he knew must have come to escort him. He commands Bedivere to hasten away with him thither, and Bedivere lifts the king up on his shoulders and starts away for the lake again. The king was dying fast; his breaths assumed the depth and frequency of gasps; his words became faint and feeble. He was afraid lest he should die before he reached the margin, and he urged Bedivere to use his utmost haste. Bedivere, who knew that he himself was responsible for the delay that might thwart Arthur's purpose, strode on as fast as he could, and here we have a description that for suggestiveness, conciseness and harmony is one of unrivalled beauty:

"Dry clashed his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clanged round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—  
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon."

As they come in sight of lake, they notice a boat lying at the margin, a dusky barge,

'Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern.'

How fitting all this to a disappearance that was practically of the nature of death! The boat is crowded with dark figures, among whom were the three Queens who surrounded Arthur's throne on the day of his coronation, and who burst forth into a lamentation that for its agony was weird and unearthly like all the other circumstances attending on Arthur's death.

Ere the king leaves the shores of the lake he explains the object of his worldly mission,—which is in fact the history of all human institutions,—in lines that have been often quoted:

"The old order changeth yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

Arthur's rule supplanted the old Roman government and was in its turn supplanted by a fresher order of things. In human institutions occasional changes are an absolute necessity ; the old and worn parts of the machinery must be replaced by new ones ; the effete and the antiquated must give way to fresh material, otherwise unhealthy stagnation, or perhaps utter break up is the inevitable result. Not that the old system is not good, but that it is not good enough : for even the most beneficent system must undergo change, otherwise from being a source of good it comes to be a source of positive evil. Arthur's rule of righteousness was perfect so far as it went, but even perfection has to adapt itself to circumstances. Ideal forms avail only for ideal beings, and the character of men has a great deal to do with the character of the institutions that spring and thrive among them. Arthur's ideal rule thrived and prospered as long as it was supported by the ideal virtue of his subjects, and began to decay as soon as the ideal began to be adulterated with the real.

Such is the feeling with which king Arthur reviews his whole history, and such is exactly the feeling of the reader as he concludes his study of the *Idylls of the King*.

The poem comes practically to an end at these lines, and what follows is either mere piety in the form of an eulogy on prayer or mere details that serve to give a completeness to the story.

‘ And the new sun rose bringing the new year ’

leads us not only to the very furthest end of Arthur's career, but also to the earliest dawn of that which succeeds it.

## II.

### THE CHARACTERS ; ARTHUR

Let us study for a while the colours in which the Poet has painted the character of Arthur in this poem.

In the *Passing of Arthur*, Arthur is altogether human, and he is dear to us throughout. The lines in which he mourns over the failure of his purposes are full of humanity : how often we blame God for evils that may be our own work !

‘ But in His ways with men I find Him not.’

Here is a sweeping denunciation of the ways of Providence, which is common in the first shock of grief : and as he rallies a little, he modifies his views : perhaps God is quite just and it is our own imperfect nature that leads us to blame Him,

‘Perchance because we see not to the close.’

Then again comes the full flow of sorrow as he is reminded of the unfaithfulness of his queen, Guinevere, the guilt of his friend Sir Lancelot, and the treachery of his kinsman Modred, and he exclaims :

‘My God, thou hast forgotten me in my death.’

How truly human does all this sound ! How truly human it is in the first rude shock of bitterness to condemn wholesale the entire system of divine government ; then, as the effects of the percussion grow less severe, to philosophise over it ; and again, as the shock returns, to revert to the blasphemy !

How thoroughly human again is his mournful utterance—

‘The king who fights his people fights himself.’

—his anticipations of the ruin that follows a civil war ! He dreads the consequences, he hesitates to move, and yet feels the stern necessity of instant action. How thoroughly like a human king is his resolve to fight a battle that he knows to be merely a forlorn hope, for he cannot tamely yield up his crown to a traitor. How thoroughly human again is his anger, when Sir Bedivere spoke the lie about Excalibur !

These little touches save Arthur's character from being entirely colourless, from being too much lifted up above this veritable world of ours. Without these, Tennyson's Arthur is an uninteresting sketch, a mere combination of abstract virtues, devoid of all those little foibles that make man. He is a valiant warrior, a just ruler, a loving husband, and so on, but if he had been wholly good, if he had been pure perfection, he could not have enlisted our sympathy, for we should have regarded him more as a god, with whom we are not of kin, than as a man partaking of our flesh and blood. These touches of human personality were all the more necessary, since the fact of Arthur's mysterious origin and mysterious end already creates an impression of super-humanity.

Arthur's kingly magnanimity is another prominent feature of his character as sketched out in the last idyll. With a loftiness truly great does he forgive Bedivere for his repeated acts of disobedience, though of course they do not fail to anger him. He is a king, but he is after all human.

His tendency to indulge in bitter sentiments of doubt and despair and his consequent irresolution are other points that strike us in his character ; and it seems that but for Bedivere's perpetual encouragement he would have done nothing.

### BEDIVERE

Bedivere's character affords a striking contrast to that of Arthur, and each throws the other into bold relief, mutually setting off and counterbalancing each other. Bedivere's unswerving loyalty supports Arthur's drooping despondency ; his practical sense makes up for the king's sentimental philosophy. He consoles the king in his low dejection, his bitter reflection over the unhappy past, his gloomy forebodings of the dark future. Hearing the king uttering melancholy sentiments about his approaching death, which was foretold to him by *Guwain's* ghost in a dream, he steps upto him and cheers him up by saying :

' And care not thou for dreams from him, but rise—  
I hear the steps of *Mordred* in the west.'

His practical nature will not brook the idea of ghosts and goblins, and will not allow lazy philosophy to get the better of active work, when any work of importance remains to be done.

Then again when, after the Last Battle, Arthur glances across the battle-field and begins to mourn again in plaintive tones, *Bedivere* again interferes, and by a strong profession of loyalty restores the king to his better sense. His simple devotion to the person of his lord is admirable, and in some places quite touching. He is a plain, blunt, honest soul, who troubles himself little about the doubts and difficulties which beset the faith of others in the question of Arthur's title to the throne. When even the king is shaken by doubts and inward questionings, he will have none of them—

' My king,  
King everywhere ! and so the dead have kings,  
There also will I worship thee as king'.

His attachment to his liege tempts him to disobey the king in the matter of throwing Excalibur into the lake. He would preserve the sword as a relic of the great king, even at the risk of disobedience, for he believes that unless some material and palpable token of him remains for future generations, there is little chance of his being remembered in aftertime :

‘ What record, or what relic of my lord  
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
And rumours of a doubt ? ’

Being convinced of this he is convinced withal of the guiltlessness of falsehood for such an object, and makes no scruple in telling lies to the king. He has no capacity to understand that Arthur possessed other means of discovering the truth, for his commonsense nature will not recognise mystic portents or supernatural agency of any kind. Arthur's passionate eagerness to have the sword thrown away into the lake at last overpowers him, and he is forced to yield and to execute the king's command faithfully.

There is something really touching in the picture of Bedivere's carrying the wounded king on his shoulders from the chapel to the margin of the lake, his swiftly striding from ridge to ridge, anxious to lose no moment when so many had already been lost by his own fault.

‘ His own thought drove him like a goad.’

Very touching also is his simple lament, when Arthur is laid in the funeral boat, and is on the point of sailing away to an unknown world—a pathos chiefly due to the personal note of sorrow in it :

‘ Ah ! my Lord Arthur whither shall I go ?  
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?  
.....  
And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
And the days darken round me, and the years,  
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.’

This is what makes the character of Bedivere so dear to us, in his simple loyalty, his practical nature, his deep devotion, his sincere lament. Altogether he is more human-hearted than the hero himself and hence claims a larger share of our sympathy.

### III THE ALLEGORY

It has already been remarked that Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is neither pure romance, nor pure epic, nor pure history, nor pure idyll, but that it partakes of the nature of each of these species of poetry and has an under current of allegory running below the story from end to end. Of course the allegory is nowhere manifest, always hidden, always unobtrusive. For poetry is not the medium of conveying moral lessons directly. Poetry that seeks to do so consciously is not poetry. Tennyson however did keep a moral aim consciously in view, but he has made mention of it only in the concluding lines 'To the Queen' and left the reader to spin out the details for himself. His general purpose in the *Idylls* is to represent 'the soul at war with sense,' and the application of it to the various parts of the story must be the reader's own.

*Arthur* represents the rational soul ; his *knights of the Round Table* stand for the high faculties of man ; the *Lady of the Lake* is religion. The *Last Battle* in the west, 'where all of high and holy died away,' represents the desperate struggle of humanity for life and faith and hope in the midst of its chilling mystery. *Excalibur* represents spiritual power, and its association with Arthur, the truth that the forces of reason and spirit must combine before righteousness can prevail over the world. Excalibur is thrown into the lake immediately before Arthur's passing away, so that it may equip the king in the next world, and this represents the truth that the life and energy of the soul do not cease with the cessation of its earthly existence, but passes on to the next world, where there is "so much to do." The three Queens, who attend Arthur as he sails away to the next world, typify the three cardinal Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, which smooth the passage of the true Christian soul from earth to heaven. The *fair city*, from which sounds of welcome are faintly heard to proceed, is clearly heaven, into which the pious soul is admitted after its earthly life is over. *Bedivere* seems to stand for practical wisdom, which aids the soul when it is weighed down by gloomy thoughts and bitter feelings, when it wavers between alternative courses and is unable to come to a fixed decision.

These seem to be the moral and spiritual truths that Tennyson seeks to impart in the last of the *Idylls*. But any attempt to trace the allegory along the lines of the story must necessarily be influenced by the personality of the person who seeks to do it, for "liberal applications lie in Art, like Nature," and—

"any man that walks the mead,  
In bud or blade or bloom may find,  
According as his humours lead,  
A meaning suited to his mind."

#### IV

### THE STYLE OF THE POEM

It is not possible to express in language the many subtle beauties of diction and rhythm we come across in Tennyson's lines. His style is almost too beautiful to be completely analysed. A few broad characteristics is all that can be named here.

(1) First we may note his wonderful power of pictorial effect. There is no English poet who can set before us more clearly and more concisely the essential features of a scene or landscape. *Cf.*—

(i) 'A broken chancel with a broken cross' (8)

(2) Next we notice that he possesses, in a high degree, the gift of making the sound of his verse echo the sense. *Cf.*—

(i) 'The bare black cliff clang'd round him as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery rock that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels' (187-89)

We are here made to *see* the black rock, and to *hear* the harsh clang simultaneously, and this is a really noble use of this gift, which may easily be misused so as to degenerate into mere quip and quibble and tricky onomatopœia. There is nothing here that can be called a device, no conscious effort; it seems but to say the simplest thing in the simplest words.

Other examples of this quality of the sound echoing the sense are—

- (ii) 'So strode he back slow to the wounded king.' (64)
- (iii) 'By zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock  
Came on the shining levels of the lake.' (49-50)

(3) There is about some of his lines a charm of classical reminiscence, due to his imitating Greek or Latin forms of expression or modes of construction, as in—

- (i) And fling him far into *the middle mere*. (36)
- (ii) This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
*In act to throw* (59 60).

(4) We may next note Tennyson's unequalled power of finding single words to give at a flash as it were a complete picture, as in

'I heard the ripple *washing* in the reeds  
And the wild water *lapping* on the crag,' (69-70)

(5) Tennyson is again unequalled in the beauty, appropriateness and grandeur of his similes. The beauty consists in their wonderful picturesqueness, the appropriateness in the elaborate aptness of details, and the grandeur in the grandeur of the source from which the comparison is taken. Of their picturesque aptness we may quote the following as an example :

'The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,  
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shook  
By night, with noises of the northern sea,' (135-140)

(6) His avoidance of commonplace words and phrases is another prominent feature of his style. Cf —

- (i) 'Moving isles of winter,' for 'floating icebergs.'
- (ii) 'The knightly growth that fringed his lips' for  
'his beard.'
- (iii) 'The great light of heaven' for 'the sun.'
- (iv) 'The place of to abs' for 'churchyard.'

(7) One of the leading characteristics of Tennyson's style is the repetition of a word or sometimes a whole line in the same or in a slightly different sense. This is done

(a) sometimes for reminding us of the similarity between the events happening, *e. g.*,

'The old order changeth yielding place to new'

(b) sometimes to denote the fulfilment of a prophecy, as—

'From the great deep to the great deep he goes'

(c) sometimes to describe similarity of results, as—

'I heard the ripple *washing* in the reeds  
And the wild water *lapping* on the crag.'

The repetition of single words in the same line is quite as frequent—

(i) *Light* was Gawain in life and *light* in death  
Is Gawain

(ii) 'On the *waste* sand by the *waste* sea they closed,' (92)

(iii) 'The voice of *days* of old and *days* to be.' (135)

(iv) 'A *broken* chancel with a *broken* cross.' (177)

(8) Notice again his use of archaic words or words in their archaic meaning, or the archaic form of spelling, e.g. —

(i) 'Brake' for 'broke.'

(ii) 'Clomb' for 'climbed.'

(iii) 'Spake' for 'spoke.'

(iv) 'Hest' for 'behest.'

(v) 'Chased' meaning 'engraved'

(vi) 'Curiously' meaning 'delicately.'

(vii) 'Quick' meaning 'living'

(9) Frequent use of alliteration, as in —

'Save for some whisper of the seething seas.' (121)

We also find —

'Wan wave,' 'hollow helmets,' 'helpless hands,' 'formless fear.'

The use of alliterative compounds is peculiarly Tennysonian

—e.g.

'Sharp-smitten.'



# MORTE D' ARTHUR

---

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd  
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;  
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,  
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their lord,  
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,  
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,  
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,  
A broken chancel with a broken cross,  
That stood on a dark strait of barren land :  
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one 10  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
' The sequel of to-day unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep  
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we  
Shall never more, at any future time,  
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,  
Walking about the gardens and the halls  
Of Camelot, as in the days that were. 20  
I perish by this people which I made,—  
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again  
To rule once more ; but, let what will be, be,  
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm

That without help I cannot last till morn.  
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,  
Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how  
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm  
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful. 30  
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across  
And took it, and have worn it, like a king ;  
And, wheresoever I am sung or told  
In aftertime, this also shall be known :  
But now delay not : take Excalibur,  
And fling him far into the middle mere :  
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :  
' It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,  
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm— 40  
A little thing may harm a wounded man ;  
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,  
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept,  
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,  
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,  
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang  
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down  
By zigzag paths, and juts of pointed rock,  
Came on the shining levels of the lake, 50

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,  
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,—  
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth  
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :  
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,  
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work  
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long  
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,  
This way and that dividing the swift mind,  
In act to throw : but at the last it seem'd  
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd  
There in the many-knotted waterflags  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge. .  
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

60

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere :  
' Hast thou performed my mission which I gave ?  
What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
' I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,  
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

70

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale :  
' Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,  
Not rendering true answer, as beseeem'd  
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight :  
For surer sign had followed, either hand,  
Or voice, or else a motion of the more.

This is a shameful thing for men to lie.  
 Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again,  
 As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing  
 I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.' 80

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time  
 Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,  
 Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought ;  
 But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,  
 How curiously and strangely chased, he smote  
 His palms together, and he cried aloud :

' And if indeed I cast the brand away,  
 Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,  
 Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,  
 Which might have pleased the eyes of many men. 90  
 What good should follow this, if this were done ?  
 What harm, undone ? Deep harm to disobey,  
 Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.  
 Were it well to obey then, if a king demand .  
 An act unprofitable, against himself ?  
 The King is sick, and knows not what he does.  
 What record, or what relic of my lord  
 Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
 And rumours of a doubt ? But were this kept,  
 Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings, 100  
 Some one might show it at a joust of arms,  
 Saying, " King Arthur's sword, Excalibur, .  
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.

Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps .  
Upon the hidden bases of the hills." ' .

So might some old man speak in the aftertime  
To all the people, winning reverence.  
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,  
And hid Excalibur the second time, 110  
And so strode back slow to the wounded King,

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :  
' What is it thou hast seen ? or what hast heard ? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :  
' I heard the water lapping on the crag,  
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :  
' Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,  
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !  
Authority forgets a dying king, 120

Laid widow'd of the power in his eye  
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,  
For thou, the latest left of all my knights,  
In whom should meet the offices of all,  
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt ;  
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl  
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.  
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,  
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :  
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur, 130  
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,  
~~And~~ And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand  
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,  
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,  
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea, 140  
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur :  
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm \_  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.  
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :  
' Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.  
Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen ? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere : 150  
' Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems  
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,  
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,  
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men, \_  
So great a miracle as yonder hilt. .  
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;  
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him  
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.' 160

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard :  
' My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone, .  
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,  
And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear  
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement <sup>Chapel</sup> he half rose,  
Slowly, with pain, <sup>leaning</sup> ~~reclining~~ on his arm,  
And looking <sup>seigniorly</sup> ~~wistfully~~ with wide blue eyes  
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere  
<sup>fully</sup> ~~Remorsefully~~ regarded thro' his tears, 170  
And would have spoken, but he found not words ;  
Then took <sup>timidly</sup> ~~with care~~ and kneeling on one knee,  
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands, <sup>low</sup>  
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs. \_

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,  
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed  
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,  
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, ' Quick, quick !  
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.' \_  
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge, 180  
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.  
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry \_

Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.  
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—  
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake, 190  
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
 Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
 Beneath them ; and descending they were ware  
 That all the decks were dense with stately forms,  
 Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these  
 Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them rose  
 A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,  
 And, as it were one voice, an agony  
 Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills, 200  
 All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
 Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, ' Place me in the barge.'  
 So to the barge they came. There those three Queens  
 Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.  
 But she, that rose the tallest of them all  
 And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,  
 And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,  
 And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,  
 And dropping bitter tears against a brow 210

Striped with dark blood : for all his face was white —  
 And colourless, and like the wither'd moon,  
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east ;  
 And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops ✓  
 Of onset ; and the light and lustrous curls—  
 That made his forehead like a rising sun glorious  
 High from the dais-throne --were parch'd with dust ;  
 Or, clotted into points and hanging loose, ✓  
 Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.  
 So like a shatter'd column lay the King ; 220  
 Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,  
 From spur to plume a star of tournament,  
 Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged  
 Before the eyes of ladies and of kings. ✓

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere :  
 ' Ah ! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go ?  
 Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes ?  
 For now I see the true old times are dead,  
 { When every morning brought a noble chance,  
 { And every chance brought out a noble knight. 230  
 { Such times have been not since the light that led —  
 —The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.  
 But now the whole Round Table is dissolved —  
 Which was an image of the mighty world,  
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,  
 And the days darken round me, and the years,  
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge :  
' The old order changeth, yielding place to new, —  
And God fulfils himself in many ways, — 240  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me —  
I have lived my life, and that which I have done,  
May He within Himself make pure ! but thou,  
If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day. —  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain, 250  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
But now farewell. I am going a long way  
With these thou seest — if indeed I go  
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt) —  
To the island-valley of Avilion ;  
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,  
Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies 260  
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,  
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail  
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan

That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,  
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood  
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere  
Revolving many memories, till the hull  
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,      270  
And on the mere the wailing died away.

But when that moan had past for evermore,  
The stillness of the dead world's winter dawn  
Amazed him, and he groan'd, ' The King is gone.'  
And therewithal came on him the weird rhyme,  
' From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

Whereat he slowly turn'd and slowly clomb  
The last hard footstep of that iron crag ;  
Thence mark'd the black hull moving yet, and cried,  
' He passes to be king among the dead,      280  
And after healing of his grievous wound  
He comes again ; but—if he come no more—  
O me, be you dark Queens in yon black boat,  
Who shriek'd and wail'd, the three whereat we gazed  
On that high day, when, clothed with living light,  
They stood before his throne in silence, friends  
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need ? '

Then from the dawn it seem'd there came, but faint  
As from beyond the limit of the world,  
Like the last echo born of a great cry,      290

Sounds, as if some fair city were one voice  
Around a king returning from his wars.

Thereat once more he moved about, and clomb  
Ev'n to the highest he could climb, and saw,  
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,  
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,  
Down that long water opening on the deep  
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go  
From less to less and vanish into light.  
And the new sun rose bringing the new year.

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# NOTES

ON

## MORTE D' ARTHUR

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**1—11. Summary.**—Bedivere, seeing Arthur's condition, carries him to a neighbouring chapel.

**1. So**—the word shows the abrupt beginning. Before Tennyson thought of writing twelve books on the history of Arthur, he had written this small poem *Morte d' Arthur*, relating the death of Arthur. See Introduction.

**All day long**—the battle lasted for 13 hours.

**Noise**—din.

**Battle**—*i.e.*, that between Arthur and his nephew Modred, who had usurped his uncle's throne, when the latter was fighting in the north.

**Rolled**—echoed and re-echoed.

**2. The mountains**—*sc.* of Lyonesse. **By**—on the shores of.

**3. King Arthur's Table**—all the knights of the Round Table, created by Arthur.

**Man by man**—one after another.

**4. Fallen**—been killed in battle. **About**—fighting by the side of.

**5. Then**—when there was no one left to continue the fight; when all his soldiers had perished in the battle.

**Because his wound was deep**—This may mean either (1) because he had received a mortal wound, or (2) because he was too severely wounded to fight any longer,—preferably the former.

**6. Uplifted him**—took him up in his arms.

**7. Bore**—carried. **Chapel**—a small church. **Nigh the field**—close to the battle-field.

8. **A broken.....cross**—the chapel was in ruins and nothing but a crumbling chancel (the eastern and most sacred part of a church) and a tumble-down cross testified to its sacred character.

9 **Dark**—barren (hence, brown—not green). **Strait**—narrow strip.

**Note**—This narrow strip of land is called a *strait*, because it was situated with water on both sides, as the geographical definition of a 'strait' is 'a narrow strip of land between two seas.'

10. **The Ocean**—the Atlantic.

11. **A great water**—a large lake.

**Note**.—Notice how the poet avoids mention of all details by choosing words that enable us to form no definite picture of the scene. He tries to convey only the general impression of the view from the chapel and describes the scene exactly as it had appeared to Bedivere's eye at first sight. Similarly, further on in l. 50 he speaks of the 'shining levels of the lake,' instead of *surface*.

**The moon was full**—the mist had disappeared, and the full moon was shining brightly in the sky.

12—37. **Summary**.—Arthur feeling his end approaching near, tells Bedivere to take Excalibur and throw it into the middle of the lake.

13. **The sequel of to-day**—the result of this day's battle. **Unsolders**—breaks to pieces; dissolves. **All**—completely.

14. **Goodliest**—best. **Fellowship**—association; order.

15. **Whereof the world holds record**—yet known; of which there is any mention in history. **Such a sleep**—the sleep of death.

16. **I think**—what my mind is filled with is.

18. **Delight our souls**—amuse ourselves. **Knightly deeds**—chivalric adventures.

20. **Camelot**—the city where Arthur held his court, now identified with a village called Queen's Camel in Somersetshire. Arthur's palace built by Merlin was here. In *The Holy Grail* Tennyson describes Camelot as a rich city built on a hill, with innumerable roofs, towers and spires, enlivened and

adorned with groves and garden-lawns, and rushing brooks and crowned with a mighty hall.

As in the days that were—as we did in the past.

21. I perish by this people which I made—my own subjects, whom I was the first to bring under one united government, have been the cause of my death and the failure of all my high purposes.

22. Sware—prophesied. Come again—come back to life.

N. B.—The sadness that overpowers the mind of the king at the sight of his fallen knights makes him disbelieve Merlin's prophecy about his second incarnation, and he cannot but think of his end as death and perishing

23. Let what will be, be—whatever my future may be; whether I come back to earth or not.

24. Deeply smitten—severely wounded. Through the helm—in the head.

25. Last—survive.

Note.—'Will be' in l. 23 is in contrast with 'am' in the next line—'whatever my *future* may be, my *present* state is that I am so severely wounded that before the morning comes I shall be dead.'

26. Therefore—since there is no hope of life for me; since my end is very near. Brand—sword. Excalibur—the name of Arthur's sword, given him by the Lady of the Lake. The name literally means 'cut-steel.'

27. Which was my pride—of which I was so proud.

Note—*For thou rememberest how in those old days.....like a king*, ll. 28—33 contain an account of how Arthur came by his famous sword.

29. Bosom—surface.

30. Samite—a rich silk stuff. Mystic, wonderful—of superhuman beauty.

31. And—Supply, "thou rememberest" after "and. Rowed across—sailed in a boat across the lake.

32. **Like a king**—Notice the points of comparison—(1) I have used the sword to defend my people against foreign aggression ; (2) I have used it for purposes of justice—to inflict punishment on offenders ; (3) I have always employed it for noble purposes ; (4) the sword has given me authority over my own people ; (5) it has added splendour and dignity to my person.

33. **Wheresoever**—in whatever country. **Sung or told**—celebrated in poetry or history.

34. **In aftertime**—in the future. **This also shall be known**—the above account of how I came by this sword shall also be related ; or, my sword will be mentioned along with me. ' Shall ' here denotes prophecy.

35. **Delay not**—Because he felt his own end approaching near.

36. **Fling**—throw. **Him**—the sword.

**Note.**—The sword possessed miraculous and supernatural powers, so that it might, without impropriety, be spoken of as a living being.

**Far**—sc. away from the shore.

**Middle mere**—the centre of the lake.

**Note.**—This is a Latin construction which Milton sometimes employs to give to his poems the charm of classical reminiscence. Moreover it is more condensed than English, and hence well suited to poetry. Interpreted according to English idiom, the phrase would mean ' the mere situated between two or among more than two other meres.'

37. **Watch**—observe carefully. **Lightly**—quickly. **Bring me word**—come and tell me what you have seen.

38—50. **Summary.**—**Bedivere** at first declines to leave Arthur alone, but at length consents, and starts off for the lake.

39. **Meet**—proper.

**Sir King**—an old style of addressing the sovereign. The modern style of addressing a king is ' your majesty.'

40. **Aidless**—helpless ; with no one beside to look after you.

41. **A little thing may harm a wounded man**—the slightest thing may cost you your life if you are left alone.

42. **Yet**—though it is not proper that I should leave you thus alone.

**Hest**—command. **All**—thoroughly. **At full**—completely.

**Note.**—43. *Watch what I see.....word*—Bedivere repeats the very words of Arthur to suggest that he promises to obey him in every particular.

44. **Ruined**—dilapidated. **Shrine**—chapel. **Stept**—went out.

45. **The moon**—the moonlight. **Athwart**—across.

**The place of tombs**—churchyard.

**N. B.**—Notice again Tennyson's avoidance of the commonplace ; he coins a phrase of his own, ' place of tombs ' for the commonplace word ' churchyard.'

46. **Lay**—were buried. **Mighty**—unusually large. **Ancient men**—men who lived in former ages.

47. **Old knights**—Danish invaders. **Sang**—swept with a sweet murmuring sound.

48. **Shrill**—loudly. **Chill**—cold. **With flakes of foam**—carrying particles of sea-water with it.

**Stepping down**—descending the slopes that led to the shores of the lake.

49. **Zigzag paths**—crooked and winding foot-tracks. **Juts**—projections. **Pointed**—sharp-edged.

50. **Shining**—sparkling in the bright moonlight.

**Levels**—surface.

**Note.**—The word ' levels ' has here been chosen in preference to ' surface,' because the poet wishes to avoid all details. See note to l. 11. The word has been used in the plural very appropriately, for the wind had broken up the surface into many surfaces.

" The short, sharp vowel sounds and the numerous dental letters in this line, making it broken in rhythm and difficult to pronounce, are in fine contrast with the broad vowels and liquid letters which make the next line run smoothly and easily off the tongue. The sound in each line exactly echoes the sense ; the crooked and broken path leads to the smooth and level shore."

51—64. **Summary.**—But when Bedivere sees the wonderful rich workmanship of the hilt, he decides not to throw the sword, and goes back to the king.

**M.**—4.

51. **There**—when he reached the shores of the lake. **Drew forth**—took out of the sheath.

52. **O'er him, drawing it**—holding it high in his hand.

53. **Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, etc.**—a long strip of cloud had hidden the moon, but it was rapidly passing off, and the moon was just issuing forth from the cloud, and therefore the end through which she was emerging was shining brightly with its rays.

**Ran forth**—shot suddenly out of the cloud.

54. **Sparkled keen with frost against the hilt**—made the richly ornamented hilt of the sword shine brilliantly in the clear frosty air.

**Hilt**—the haft together with the iron work that covers it.

55. **Twinkled with diamond sparks**--was studded with diamonds that shone beautifully in the bright moonlight.

56. **Myriads**—a large number. **Topaz-lights**—bright rays of light radiating from the many coloured topazes set in the hilt. The topaz is a jewel of many colours, yellow, green, brown, or blue.

**Jacinth-work**—ornamented with precious stones of a blue and purple colour.

57. **Subtlest**—"most skilfully wrought." (Rowe).

59. **This way and that dividing the swift mind**—hesitating whether to throw the sword or not.

**Swift mind**—as he was rapidly comparing the consequences of disobeying the king's command—the gain that would accrue to him, the punishment he was likely to suffer, the chances of being detected, and so on,—with the only result that would follow from his obedience—the loss of such a beautiful thing from the world.

60. **In act to throw**--just as he was preparing to throw it away.

62. **There**—on the margin of the lake. **Many-knotted**—having a root-like knotted stem. **Water-flags**—a kind of aquatic plant with sword-shaped leaves.

63. **Whistled**—rustled in the wind.

**Stiff and dry**—because they did not grow *in* the water, but on the bank, and therefore their rubbing against each other produced a hard crackling sound.

64. **Strode**—walked with slow, heavy steps.

65—80. **Summary**.—When questioned by Arthur as to what he has seen, Bedivere tells him a lie, and is sent back to the lake on the same mission.

66. **Performed my mission**—done the task I entrusted to you.

69. **Ripple**—small waves. **Washing**—softly splashing.

70. **Wild**—blown hither and thither violently by the wind. **Lapping**—making a sharp sound when striking against the rocks.

71. **Faint and pale**—(1) because he was now fast dying ; and (2) because he was sadly disappointed in hearing this falsehood from Bedivere.

72. **Betrayed thy nature and thy name**—proved false to thy instinctive sense of honour and to thy title of knight.

73. **Not rendering true answer**—in thus telling a lie to me. **Beseemed**—befitted ; was consonant with.

74. **Fealty**—fidelity.

75. **Surer sign**—something more definite than mere ripples and waves.

**Had**—must have. **Followed**—been seen after Bedivere had thrown the sword.

**N. B.**—Arthur knew that an arm, ' clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful ' would rise from the lake, and grasp the sword, and take it down below.

77. **This is a shameful thing.....lie**—falsehood is a sign of cowardice and cowardice in a man in disgraceful.

78. **Charge**—solemnly command.

79. **Lief**—beloved ; an archaic word.

81—116. **Summary**.—He goes again and again comes back to the king without having thrown the sword ; when questioned again as to what he saw, he again tells a lie.

82. **Ridge**—long line of rocks. **Beside**—on the margin of.

83. **Dewy**—wet with sprays of water. **Fixed in thought**—absorbed in contemplation.

**Note.**—This line describes a fact of common experience. When the mind is seriously absorbed in deep contemplation on something of great importance the senses often mechanically employ themselves in noticing trifling objects.

84. **The wonder of the hilt**—the exquisite workmanship of the hilt.

85. **Curiously**—skilfully. **Strangely**—wonderfully. **Chased**—engraved.

**Smote his palms together**—clapped his hands—showing that he had come to some sudden determination.

87. **Indeed**—really **Cast**—throw.

88. **One worthy note**—a remarkable thing.

90. **Which might have.....men**—which, if preserved, would delight beholders.

91. **What good should.....done?**—i.e., no good at all can come out of my throwing away the sword.

92. **What harm, undone?**—i.e., no evil can possibly arise if I do not throw away the sword.

**Deep harm to disobey**—disobedience is most reprehensible.

93. **Seeing**—since ; because.

**Obedience is the bond of rule**—submission to lawful authority is what keeps a kingdom in order ; disobedience is detrimental to good government.

94. **Were it**—would it be. **Well**—proper.

95. **Unprofitable**—useless. **Against himself**—which is opposed to his own interests.

94—5. **Were it well to obey then.....himself?**—The argument is :—I admit that it is our duty to obey the king. But is it our duty to obey him unconditionally, in all cases—even when he orders us to do something which is clearly opposed to his own interests, and which brings no good to anyone ?

96. **Knows not what he does**—cannot fully realize all the consequences of his act.

97. **Record**—trustworthy account. **Relic**—memento

98. **Should be**—will descend. **Aftertime**—posterity.

**But**—except. **Empty breath**—mere rumours.

99. **Rumours of a doubt**—vague reports of a legendary nature

**Kept**—preserved.

100. **Stored**—carefully and securely kept.

101. **Show**—exhibit. **Joust of arms**—tournament.

103. **Wrought**—made. **Maiden of the Lake**—Lady of the Lake.

**Note.**—She is described in *the Coming of Arthur* in the following words :—

‘ Who knows a subtler magic than his own—  
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,  
She gave the king his huge cross hilted sword,  
Whereby to drive the heathen out : a mist  
Of incense curl’d about her and her face  
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom ’;

104. **Deeps**—bottom of the lake.

105. **Hidden**—submerged. **Bases**—foot.

106. **So**—in the above manner **Some old man**—some one who may be presumed to have been a contemporary of Arthur.

**In the aftertime**—in some subsequent age.

107. **Winning reverence**—commanding the respect of his hearers, who would, on hearing those stories, naturally feel inclined to honour him as one who lived in Arthur’s time and was an eyewitness of the events he related.

Just in the same way we in India respect an old man who tells us of his experiences of the Indian Mutiny of 1857.

108. **But now**—but if I throw away the sword. **Much honour and much fame**—a great deal of the glory and renown which would otherwise be associated with Arthur’s name. **Were**—would be.

109. **Clouded**—misled **Conceit**—false notion. **Clouded with his own conceit**—his false notion, that the sword should be preserved, deprived him of the power of distinguishing right from wrong.

112. **Breathing heavily**—breathing with difficulty—showing that death was fast approaching

117—160. **Summary**.—When severely reproached by the king, he goes for the third time and throws the sword into the lake, and then comes back to the king and relates what he saw.

118. **Miserable**—mean wanting in nobility (because he told a lie).

**Unkind**—wanting in humanity ; cruel, (because he was trying to deceive the king in his last moments).

**Untrue**—wanting in loyalty, (because he had disobeyed the king)

119. **Unknightly**—wanting in true chivalry ; unworthy of being called a knight.

**Traitor-hearted**—treacherous, though appearing loyal in outward conduct

120 **Forgets**—forsakes.

121. **Laid widowed of**—deprived of. **Eye**—looks.

122. **Bowed the will**—inspired obedience in the subject.

**Explanation**—**Authority forgets a dying king.....will**.—When the commanding look that inspires awe in the subject and impels him to obedience, passes from the face of a king, at his death, he ceases to be obeyed.

**Critical Note**.—Prof. Brimley remarks : " This personification of ' Authority ' is thoroughly Shakespearian ; it assists the imagination without distressing the understanding, as when dwelt on and expanded in detail ; deepening the impression of the sentiment by giving along with a true thought a grand picture "

122. **I see thee what thou art**—now it is that your true character has been revealed to me (till now I have been deceived by a semblance).

123. **Latest-left**—last survivor.

124. In whom should meet the offices of all—who ought to be as dutiful to me as all the other knights combined; who should by himself perform all the duties that were formerly performed by all my knights jointly.

125. Wouldst—wishes to. Betray me—prove false to me.

For—in order to obtain possession of.

126. Lust of gold—greed. Like a girl—stupidly.

127. Valuing—attaching too much importance to; thinking too highly of.

Giddy—frivolous. Pleasure of the eyes—sensuous enjoyment

128. Fail in duty—omit to perform what he is bound in conscience to perform.

129. Prosper—succeed in doing his duty. Get thee hence—go.

Note.—The sentence 'get thee hence' is spoken by way of rebuke.

130. Spare—omit.

131. With my hands—Either (1) 'strangle you,' because he had no sword to cut off his head; or (2) 'myself' 'with my own hands.'

Note.—Professor Rowe remarks in this connection: "Notice the touch of human personality in the king's sharp anger; otherwise Arthur is generally represented by Tennyson as a rather colourless being, and as almost "too good for human nature's daily food."

133. Lightly—nimble. Plunged—jumped down.

Notice that the first time Bedivere proceeded towards the lake his movement is described as 'stept' and 'came'; the second time, as 'went'; this time it is 'leapt' and 'pluoged'

134. Bulrush beds—plots of ground overgrown with bulrush, a kind of water plant.

Clutched—held it firmly in his hands.

135. Strongly—with great force. Wheeled—swung it over his head.

136. Made lightnings—sent out a succession of brilliant flashes. Splendour—bright light.

137. **Flashing round and round**—sparkled brilliantly as it was swung round, and formed circles of light around his head.

**Whirled in an arch**—forming a huge curve of light as it darted through the air.

138. **Shot—darted. Streamer of the northern morn**—one of the rays of electrical light (of which the *Aurora Borealis* is constituted) darting across the sky from the horizon.

139 **Seen where the floating isles of winter shock**—a phenomenon sometimes visible in the Arctic regions, where huge floating icebergs collide against each other.

**Note.**—‘Where the floating... ..shock’ is a periphrasis for ‘the Arctic regions.’ ‘Floating isles of winter’ is a good instance of Tennyson’s avoidance of the commonplace. ‘Shock’ means ‘strike against each other.’

140. **With noises of the Northern Sea**—and the shock of the collision is mingled with the roar of the Arctic Ocean.

**Note.**—**Like a streamer of the northern morn etc.**—This is an example of what may be called a ‘tailed’ simile, that is, one in which the comparison is made by heaping image on image till the mind is staggered with the feeling which the poet seeks to represent, and then the picture closes by suddenly drawing the attention of the reader down to the thing which the poet is describing. Milton is very fond of such similes. In Matthew Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustam* too there are no less than fifteen or twenty such similes.

‘*So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur*’—This is the line that finishes the comparison, and is truly Miltonic in grandeur. Prof. Stopford Brooke quotes the line, and adds: “and never yet in poetry did any sword flash and fall so superbly.”

142. **He**—i.e., the sword. See note to l. 205. **Dipt**—sank below.

143. **Clothed in white etc.**—This line is a kind of permanent epithet to the ‘arm.’

144. **Brandished**—waved.

147. **Drawing thicker breath**—breathing more heavily.

148. **See I by thine eyes**—clearly infer from your looks.

**This is done**—my order has been carried out.

151. **Sir King**—see note to l. 208. **Closed mine eyelids**—shut my eyes.

152. **Blind my purpose**—make me forget my duty.

153. **Here or elsewhere**—either in this country or in any other.

154. **Though I live.....men**—even though I should live three times the average length of human life.

155. **So great a miracle**—a thing of such surpassingly wonderful beauty.

156. **With both hands**—using as much force as I could.

**Wheeling him**—after swinging it round my head, so as to give greater impetus to the motion.

157. **Looked**—opened my eyes. Remember, he had closed his eyes when throwing the sword

**Behold**—what should I see but.

**Note.**—‘Behold an arm, clothed, etc.’—Prof. Robertson remarks “Something of a magical effect is produced by the repetition of these words.”

161—191. **Summary.**—Bedivere is then told by the king to carry him to the margin of the lake on his shoulders, which he accordingly does with all haste.

162. **Draws nigh**—is approaching. **’Tis time that I were gone**—now I must be removed from this place to the margin of the lake.

163. **Make broad.....weight**—prepare yourself to carry me on your shoulders.

165. **Taken cold**—caught a numbness.

166. **Pavement**—floor (of the chapel). **Half rose**—put himself in a recumbent posture.

167. **Reclining**—leaning; supporting himself.

168. **Wistfully**—eagerly. **Looking with wide eyes**—staring.

169. **As in a picture**—with the fixed and expectant gaze one often sees in the eyes of a painted portrait—*i.e.*, his eyes had no particular light in them.

170 **Remorsefully**—sorrowfully. **Regarded**—observed; looked at.

**Through his tears**—with his eyes full of tears.

171 **Found not words**—he was too much overpowered by emotion to be able to speak

172. **With care**—tenderly.

173. **Languid**—hanging loosely.

174. **Place of tombs**—churchyard. See note to l. 214.

175. **Panted hard**—breathed very heavily.

176. **Nightmare**—a very oppressive dream. **On his bed**—in his sleep.

177. **Mute**—silent. **Sighed**—breathed heavily.

178 **Muttering**—speaking indistinctly. **Murmuring**—speaking in a low voice.

**At his ear.**—The body was on his back; the arms were round his neck; and the head was resting on one of his shoulders; his lips were therefore close to one of Bedivere's ears.

179 **It is too late**—too much delay has already occurred. **I shall die**—i. e., before I reach the lake.

180. **But**—Bedivere, unlike Arthur, had hopes of reaching the lake in time—hence the 'but'. **Strode**—walked on.

181. **Clothed with his breath**—the night being frosty, his damp breath cooled down quickly into fog, and lingered about him, instead of passing off into the atmosphere, so that he was "enveloped as by a cloak in a mist caused by his own damp breath."

**Note.**—This phrase is at once scientific and poetic—a rare combination effected by a genius only. In Tennyson such instances are frequent. *Of.*—

'Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears,  
That grief hath shaken into frost!'

—*In Memoriam, IV*

182. **Larger than human**—as huge as a giant. **Frozen**—covered with frost.

The effect of frost is that it magnifies objects seen through it.

183. **The deep**—the murmuring of the sea.

184. **Before**—in front of him **His own thought**—“the remorse he felt for his disobedience and the fear that the king might suddenly die.” (Rowe).

**Drove him like a goad**—perpetually urged him on. A *goad* is a stick to urge oxen.

185. **Dry clashed**—produced a hard, grating sound. **Harness**—armour.

**Icy**—covered with snow.

186. **Chasms**—hollows between rocks. **All to left and right**—on either side of him.

187. **Bare**—with no trees or shrubs growing on them. **Black**—brown,—not green, as they would be if covered with verdure. **Clanged round him**—echoed the clanking of his armour. **Based**—planted.

**Note.**—Professor Rowe remarks on this line : “Observe the alliteration, and the number of accented monosyllables succeeding each other, thus representing the successive reverberations of sound.”

188. **Juts**—projected points. **Crag**—rock. **Rang**—gave out a sharp sound.

189. **Sharp-smitten**—trodden. **Dint**—force. **Armed heels**—heels studded with nails.

**Note.**—Observe the condensed language. There were three reasons why the crags gave out a sharp sound—

(1) because Bedivere was walking in haste ;

(2) because he was treading slippery ground, and therefore planting his feet firmly ;

(3) because he wore boots supplied with iron heels.

190. **Lo! the level lake**—Paraphrase :—‘he reached the lake and beheld with wonder.’

191. **Long glories of the winter moon**—the long pathways of light formed by the moonlight across the smooth surface of the lake.

**Note.**—Notice how the difficulty of Bedivere’s journey through the rocks is aptly denoted by the frequent stress laid on the words in

ll. 177-79, and his relief, when he came in sight of the lake, well denoted by the ease with which the next two lines pass off the tongue.

192—202. **Summary.**—They notice a dark boat waiting at the margin of the lake, which, on their approaching nearer, is seen to be crowded with dark shapes, among whom there were three Queens, all robed in black.

192. **Hove**—rose in sight. **Dusky**—dark. **Barge**—boat.

193 **From stem to stern**—the whole length of the boat, from end to end.

194. **Beneath them**—at their feet. 'They were on a high rock just above the margin of the lake, hence 'beneath.'

**Descending**—going further down the slopes that led to the shores of the lake. **They were ware**—they observed.

**Note**—'Ware' is only an old form of 'aware.'

195 **Dense**—"thickly crowded." (Rowe). **Stately**—tall and dignified. **Forms**—figures.

**Note**—Notice again the poet's avoiding all details. Of course 'forms' means 'persons,' but 'persons' would have given definiteness to the picture, which Tennyson wished to avoid. See note to l. 180.

196 **Black-stoled**—wearing long black robes. 'The *stole* was a long loose garment reaching to the feet.'

**Black-hooded**—wearing black head-dresses.

**Like a dream**—so dimly seen as scarcely to be recognised.

**By**—seated near.

197. **Three Queens**—These were—(1) Queen Morgan le Fay, Arthur's sister; (2) the Queen of Northgales; (3) the Queen of the Waste Lands.

**From them rose**—they burst forth into.

198. **A cry that shivered** .....stars—a cry so loud and so full of agony that it pierced the sky and made the stars tremble in sympathy.

**Note.**—A critic finds fault with this line on the ground that it has a touch of exaggeration which belongs to the 'spasmodic

school' of poetry, a class that is now very much out of favour. Prof. Brimley answers the objection by saying:—"But the cry comes from a company of spirits amid mountains whose natural power of echo is heightened by the silence of night, the clearness of the winter air, and the hardening effects of frost. Such a cry, at such a time, and in such a place, would thrill from rock to rock, from summit to summit, till it seemed to pierce the sky in a hurtling storm of multitudinous arrow sounds, and die away in infinitely distant pulsations among the stars."

199. As it were one voice—a united scream.

An agony of lamentation—a most painful wail.

200. Shrills—blows with a sharp, piercing sound.

201. Where no one comes—not frequented by men.

The making of the world—the creation.

**Note.**—190—92—The idea of loneliness and desolation is admirably brought out by this simile. A waste land is very lonely; it is made more lonely by night; no one being there intensifies the loneliness which is further intensified by no one's having ever been there since the creation of the world.

There is a simile in *Enoch Arden* in which the idea of faint recollection is similarly intensified—

'Faint as a figure seen in early dawn,  
Down at the far end of an avenue,  
Going we know not where'

203—224. **Summary**—Bedivere places Arthur in the boat, where the three Queens receive him with much weeping and wailing.

205. Put forth their hands—stretched out their arms.  
**Took**—received.

206. **Rose the tallest**—was found to be the tallest when they all stood up to receive the king.

208. **Loosed**—unfastened. **Casque**—armour for the head. **Chafed**—rubbed them to make them warm.

209. **Complaining**—wailing.

210. **Bitter tears**—tears caused by great sorrow. **Against**,—upon. **A brow**—Arthur's forehead.

211. **Striped with dark blood**—the blood which came out of the wound he had received in the head flowed down to

his forehead in lines, and had frozen as it flowed, and therefore looked dark.

**White**—bloodless.

212. **Colourless**—pallid. **Withered**—faded.

213. **Smote by the fresh beam**.....east—when its light grows faint before the early rays of the rising sun.

214. **Greaves**—armour for the legs. **Cuisses**—armour for the thighs.

**Dashed with drops of onset**—marked with spots of blood which flowed from wounds he had received in battle.

215. **Light and lustrous**—fresh-coloured and bright.

216. **Like a rising sun**—a glorious spectacle.

**Note.**—The bright curls that covered his head are compared with the bright rays of light surrounding the disc of the rising sun.

217. **High from the dais-throne**—as he sat on his throne placed upon a platform.

**Parched with dust**—embrowned with dust.

218. **Clotted into points**—gathered into knots. **Hanging loose, mixed with**.....lips—and were hanging loosely over his face so that they were mixed with his beard.

219. **The knightly growth that fringed his lips**—his beard, the great facial characteristic of a young and valiant knight.

220. **So like a shattered column lay the King**—*i.e.*, Arthur lay in the boat like a stately pillar broken to pieces; gone was his strength to support a kingdom, gone was his dignity, gone was his graceful form.

**Note.**—The points of comparison between Arthur and a pillar are :—

(1) strength to support ; (2) dignity ; (3) graceful form.

221. **Not like that Arthur whoe tc.**—he looked very different from what he was in former times, as if he were some other man altogether.

**In rest**—held ready in a position of attack. **Rest** is the support for the spear when it is brought in a position of attack.

222. From spur to plume—from head to foot. **A star of tournament**—the most brilliant of all the knights assembled in the tournament.

**Note.**—‘A star of tournament’ suggests (1) that he was gazed at by all, (2) admired by all, (3) followed by all. That is, he excelled all the other knights in every detail of knighthood.

223. Shot through the lists—rushed on horseback across the enclosed area where the tournament was held, as a meteor shoots across the sky.

**Note.**—This suggests that he rode very fast and dazzled the eyes of the beholders with the wonderful display of his skill in arms.

**Charged**—encountered his opponent.

224. Before the eyes of—in the presence of.

225-237. **Summary.**—Bedivere lamenting over Arthur's passing away.

226. Whither shall I go?—what will become of me now that you are gone?

227. Where shall I hide..eyes?—life for me is now no longer worth living; there is no place to which I can go and get comfort.

228. The true old times are dead—the golden age of chivalry is past

229. Where every morning.....chance—when every day some opportunity or other of redressing the wrongs of the people presented itself to us.

230. And every chance.....knight—and every such opportunity gave a knight the chance of distinguishing himself.

231. Such times—such an age of righteousness.

Since the light that led the holy Elders etc.—*i e.*, since the birth of Christ.

Arthur is here compared to the star in the East that appeared at the birth of Christ to the Wise Men, and led them to Bethlehem, where they presented to the new-born Child offerings of gold, frankincense and myrrh. *Vide the Bible—*

“When they had heard the king, they departed; and, the star which they saw in the east, went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

—*Matthew*, ii, 9—11.

233. **Now**—*i. e.* now that all the knights of the Round Table (except Bedivere) were dead and Arthur, their leader, too was going.

**Dissolved**—broken up.

234. **Which** was an image of the mighty world—which was made round in shape so as to represent the roundness of the earth, and the universality of the world—its membership being open to every man, whatever country he came from, provided he possessed the necessary qualifications.

235. **The last**—the sole survivor. **Go forth**—am destined to live in the world.

**Companionless**—with no one to help or comfort me.

236. **The days darken round me**—life is becoming more and more miserable for me.

**And the years**—*sc.* darken round me, *i. e.*, the immediate as well as the remote future is destined to be miserable.

237. **Among new.....minds**—which I must pass in the company of strangers and unsympathetic men. See note to l. 5.

238-263. **Summary**.—Arthur asks Bedivere to pray for him, and tells him that he is going to the island of Avilion to cure his wound.

238. **Slowly**—in a low voice.

239. **The old order changeth.....new**—it is a great and universal truth that customs and institutions, when they have existed for a time, become effete, perish, and are supplanted by fresh ones.

**Note**.—A line oft-quoted. The old form 'changeth' is here used in preference to the modern 'changes,' because the line contains a great and universal truth.

The line also occurs in the *Coming of Arthur*, because Arthur's advent marked the close of an old epoch and the commencement of a new one in the history of Britain. The Roman dominion in Britain was at an end, and Arthur says to the great Roman lords who claimed their tribute as of old,

Behold, for these have sworn  
To wage my wars, and worship me their king ;  
The old order changeth yielding place to new ;  
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,  
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old  
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,  
No tribute will we pay."

240. **And God fulfils Himself in many ways**—God has numerous methods of carrying out His great purposes, and is frequently adopting new modes.

241. **Lest one good custom.....world**—lest the too long continuance of the same institutions, however beneficial they might originally have been, should cause stagnation and be productive of evil.

*I. e.*, Customs and institutions originate in accordance with the necessities of the time. It is some want that they supply, and in so far are beneficial to society. When the conditions of the age change, they lose their efficacy, and ought then to be replaced by new ones more suited to the new conditions of society. But if they are not abolished they may prove a positive source of evil.

242. **Comfort thyself**—you must find comfort for yourself. I have no means of comforting you.

243. **I have lived my life**—my career is over ; my term of life has expired.

**That which I have done**—my work.

244. **May He within Himself make pure**—may God accept my services, recognise them as His own, and purify them of all evil elements.

246. **Pray for my soul**—pray that God may grant peace to my spirit.

246-47. **More things are wrought by prayer.....of**—people in general do not fully realise the marvellous efficacy of M.—5.

prayer ; prayer can do many things for man which he erroneously supposes to be beyond its power.

**Note**—A sentiment truly Shakespearean, and eminently quotable. Cf.—

‘ There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than was ever dreamt of in your philosophy’

—*Hamlet*.

**Wherefore**—and therefore.

247—48. **Let thy voice rise like a fountain.....day**—be continually praying to God for me.

**Note**.—The points of comparison between prayer and a fountain are :—

- (1) directed towards heaven, just as a fountain jets upwards ;
- (2) constantly, as a fountain plays without stopping ;
- (3) having power to purify and ennoble the heart, as a fountain refreshes and fertilises the surrounding ground.

In *Enoch Arden*, prayer is again compared to a fountain—

“ Prayer from a living source, within the will,  
And beating up through all the bitter world,  
Like fountains of sweet water in the sea,  
Kept him a living soul.”

249. **What**—in what respects. **Better**—higher in the order of creation.

**Sheep or goats**—lower animals ; brutes.

250. **Nourish**—*i.e.*, lead. **Blind life**—a life not illuminated by reason ; *i.e.*, devoid of the guidance of reason, and guided only by instinct.

**Within the brain**—conscious only of what can be perceived by instinct and sense.

258. **Knowing God**—even though they possess the faculty of recognising God.

**Lift not hands of prayer**—do not pray.

252. **Those who call them friend**—those who are near and dear to them.

**Explanation**.—For what are men better than sheep or goats.....friend—Without prayer, man is in no degree higher in

the order of creation than lower animals, who are guided only by instinct and have consciousness only of what they can perceive by sense. It is the faculty of recognising God that makes man rank above the brute creation. Knowledge of God alone is not sufficient; it must be combined with prayer to God both for their own selves and for those who are near and dear to them.

253 So—in this way, *i. e.*, by means of prayer. **Round earth**—the world. **Every way**—in every little detail of its life.

254 **Bound by gold chains**...God—is entirely dependent for its existence upon the mercy of God.

**Note.**—The idea of the earth being suspended by a chain from heaven is very ancient. The image represents the truth that there is an indissoluble bond of connection between God and His creatures.

The word 'feet' represents the mercy of God.

256 **These thou sees**—these three Queens and their followers.

**If indeed I go**—although I am not quite sure that I am really going.

257. **All my mind.....doubt**—everything pertaining to me seems uncertain and unknown.

**Note.**—There are seasons when a man really feels doubtful about everything. Such a season has been well described by Tennyson in *In Memoriam* :

“When the sensuous frame  
Is racked with pangs that conquer trust,  
And Time a maniac scattering dust,  
And Life a fury slinging flame.”

The doubtful issue of the Last Battle, and the doubtful realization of his purposes make the king doubt his end too.

258. **Island valley**—a valley situated in an island.

**Avilion**—a place supposed to have been a valley in an island of the river near Glastonbury in Somersetshire. In mediæval legends it is described as a sort of earthly paradise whither the favourites of the gods were conveyed without dying.

259. **Where falls not hail...snow**—where the weather is delightful in all seasons of the year.

Compare Tennyson's description of the abode of the gods in *Lucretius*—

"The Gods, who haunt  
The lucid interspace of world and world,  
Where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind,  
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,  
Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,  
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar  
Their sacred everlasting calm!"

260. **Nor ever wind blows loudly**—not ever any storm.  
**Lies**—is situated in a valley.

261. **Deep-meadowed**—having meadows covered with thick long grass,

**Happy**—*i.e.*, fertile. **Fair with**—beautified with **Orchard lawns**—grass plots in a garden.

262. **Bowery**—shady. **Hollows**—caves **Crowned with summer sea**—surrounded by the clear, calm waters of the sea.

254—290. **Summary**—The boat leaves the shores of the lake and Bedivere long remains gazing at it till the distance hides it altogether from view.

264. **With oar and sail**—rowed by boatmen and at the same time sailing with the help of the wind.

**Note.**—Notice the idiomatic omission of the article before both of these words.

265. **Brink**—shore. **Like some full breasted swan**—the boat with its sails filled with wind looked like a swan with its breast stretched out swimming in the water.

266. **Fluting**—singing sweetly. **Wild carol**—an enchanting piece of song.

**Note.**—The reference here is to the ancient tradition that the swan sings a sweet song just before its death.

267. **Ruffles**—unfolds. **Pure**—white. **Cold**—'cold' is in English literature always used in association with 'white,' 'warm' with 'red.' Cf.—

'When the cold light's uncertain shower.  
Streams on the ruined central tower.'

—*Scott*,

**Plume**—feathers. **Takes the flood**—swims in the water.

**Note.**—Notice the peculiarly graphic character of the phrase. It describes the scene exactly as it appears to the eye. The action of a swan swimming in the water is like its taking handfuls of water.

268 **Swarthy webs**—dark webbed feet.

269. **Revolving many memories**—thinking of a great many events of the past.

**Hull**—boat.

270. **One black dot**—a single dark speck. **Against the verge of dawn**—"on the bright eastern horizon where the day was dawning." (Rowe)

271. **Died away**—was heard no more.

272. **Past for evermore**—entirely died away.

273. **Stillness**—perfect calm. **Dead**—so absolutely noiseless as to seem destitute of life.

274. **Amazed**—awed.

275. **Therewithal**—as soon as he uttered that. **Came on him**—he was suddenly reminded of.

**Weird**—either (1) composed by one more than human—Merlin the wizard ; or (2) having a mysterious meaning.

276. **From the great deep .....goes**—Arthur came no man knows whence, and goes back no man knows whither.

**Note**—This line occurs in the *Coming of Arthur*, and forms part of Merlin's prophecy :—

" Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow in the sky !  
A young man will be wiser by and by ;  
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.  
Rain, rain, and Sun ! a rainbow on the lea !  
And truth is this to me, and that thee ;  
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

Rain, rain, and Sun ! and the free blossom blows :  
Sun, rain, and sun ! where is he who knows ?  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

277. **Whereat**—and then. **Clomb**—climbed (archaic form).

278. **Last**—highest. **Footstep**—ledge. **Iron**—rocky.

279. **Marked**—observed.

281. **Grievous**—deadly.

**Note.**—*After healing of his wound*—There is here a confusion of construction between two forms—‘*the healing of his wound*’ and ‘*healing his wound*’—a confusion between the use of the verbal noun and the gerund.

282. **Comes**—will come.

283. **Be**—are. **You**—those.

284. **The three**—those very three queens.

285. **High**—great and joyful. **Clothed**—surrounded.  
**Living**—bright.

**Note.**—The reference here is to the *Coming of Arthur*—  
“Three fair queens,

‘Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends  
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright  
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.”

288. **From the dawn**—from the east where the morning was dawning.

289. **As from beyond .....world**—so faintly that it seemed as if the sound proceeded from the other end of the world.

290. **Like the last echo**—like the echo of a sound immediately before it dies away. **Born of**—produced by. **Great**—loud.

291. **Were one voice**—were uttering one united burst of welcome.

292. **Returning from his wars**—marching home in triumph.

295. **Straining his eyes**—using his utmost effort to see the boat.

**Beneath an arch of hand**—by shading his eye brows with his hand.

296. **Or thought he saw**—either actually saw or imagined that he saw.

*Cf. Enoch Arden :—*

“ There often as he watched or seemed to watch.”

**The speck**—the boat looking like a mere dot in the distance **Bare**—bore ; (archaic form).

297. **Long water**—large lake. **Opening on the deep**—connected with the sea.

298. **Pass on and on**—moving forward continually.

299. **Go from less to less**—growing more and more imperceptible.

**Vanish into light**—till nothing could be discerned except the light of the sun filling the atmosphere.

300. **New sun rose**—the new day dawned. **Bringing**—ushering in.

**The new year**—sc. which marked the commencement of a new cycle

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## APPENDIX I

### PARAPHRASE OF THE POEM, PARA. BY PARA.

1—11.—Thus all day the din of battle echoed and re-echoed among the mountains on the sea-coast, till all the knights of the Round Table one after another fell fighting beside their leader King Arthur. Since the king's wound seemed serious, Bedivere took him up in his arms and carried him to the neighbouring ruins of a chapel, situated on a narrow strip of barren land, and bounded on one side by the Atlantic Ocean and on the other by a large lake. The mist had disappeared and the moon was shining brightly in the sky.

12—37.—King Arthur then said to Bedivere: "The result of this day's battle is that it completely breaks to pieces the noblest order of knighthood yet known. My beloved knights are all dead. Never again shall we amuse ourselves by relating stories of chivalric adventures as we sauntered about the gardens and the halls of Camelot, as we did in the happy past. My own subjects, whom I brought under one united government, have been the cause of my death and the failure of all my high purposes. And my end is certainly *death*, in spite of what Merlin prophesied about my second incarnation and second reign. But whatever my future may be, my present condition is that I am so severely wounded in the head that I cannot survive till morning without help. Now, since my end is so near, take my sword Excalibur, of which I was so proud. You remember how I came to possess it, how one summer noon, as I was rowing over the lake, a mysterious arm clothed in white samite appeared above the surface holding this sword, and how I rowed up to it and took it, and have since used it in the exercise of my royal functions. In whatever country and in whatever age my name is celebrated in poetry, or history, this sword will be mentioned along with me. But now do not lose time; take the sword and throw it far into the middle of the lake, and then come back quickly and report to me what you see."

38—43.—Bedivere made answer: "It is not proper for me to leave your majesty alone in your present wounded state and with no one to help you, for the slightest thing may cost you your life. Nevertheless I shall carry out your command completely and thoroughly."

44—50—So saying he left the chapel and came out into the moonlight, and crossed the churchyard, where the bones of old Danish invaders lay in heaps, and where the wind was blowing keen and sharp, carrying particles of sea water. He proceeded along crooked and broken paths, and passing by projections of sharp-edged rocks, he came at last to the shores of the lake sparkling in the bright moonlight.

51—64.—There he took the sword out of its sheath, and as he held it high in his hand, the moon, just emerging from a long strip of cloud, shone upon it and made the richly ornamented hilt sparkle brilliantly in the clear frosty air. For the handle was gaily studded with diamonds, topazes and other precious stones of beautiful workmanship. He gazed so long at the hilt that his eyes were dazzled with the glow of light, and he hesitated whether to throw it away or not, rapidly surveying the arguments *pro* and *con*. The decision he formed at last was that it was better to leave it concealed among the water-flags that grew on the margin of the lake, and he did so, and went back to the king.

65—70—The king asked Bedivere: "Have you done the work I entrusted you? Tell me what you have seen or heard." Bedivere replied: "I heard the wavelets of the lake splashing in the reeds, and the larger waves dashing on the rock."

71—80—Arthur then spoke out: "You have proved false to your instinctive sense of honour and to your title of knight in thus telling a lie to me, an act so unworthy of your fidelity and so unknighly. For something more definite than mere ripples and waves must have been seen after you had thrown the sword, such as a hand or a voice or a motion of the lake. Lying is the most disgraceful act for man. I solemnly command you to go again (as you are dear to me) and do what I have ordered you—watch and quickly come and report what you have seen or heard."

81—108.—Bedivere went again across the rocks to the lake, on the margin of which he walked to and fro, absorbed in deep reflection, his senses mechanically employing themselves in counting the wet pebbles. But when he saw the exquisite workmanship of the hilt, he clapped his hand and cried out.

" And if I really throw away the sword, the consequence will be that a most costly thing, a most remarkable thing will disappear for ever from the world ; but if preserved it would have been an object of delight to beholders. No good at all can come out of my throwing away the sword ; no evil can possibly arise out of my not throwing it. It is no doubt generally true that disobedience of the king's order is detrimental to good government ; but is it our duty to obey the king unconditionally in everything—even when he asks us to do something which is clearly opposed to his own interests, and which brings no good to any one ? The king is not in a fit condition to realize all the consequences of his act. Unless some material and palpable relic of the king is preserved, no trace of his deeds will remain for posterity except vague, uncertain rumours. On the other hand, if the sword is carefully preserved in the treasure house of great kings, some one might exhibit it at a tournament saying : ' This is king Arthur's sword, Excalibur, made by the Lady of the Lake in nine years in her home at the foot of rocks submerged in the lake.' In these words may some old man speak to the men of a later generation and command respect. But if the sword is thrown away, much of the glory and renown which would otherwise be associated with Arthur's name would be lost.

109—116 —Thus he spoke to himself, misled by his own false notion ; and hid the sword again, and again went back to the king, who asked him what he had seen or heard, and again received the same lie from the knight.

117—131—Arthur replied in a rage : " Ah thou, wanting in nobility, wanting in humanity, wanting in loyalty, wanting in true chivalry ! O thou traitor ! Alas, when the commanding look, that inspires awe and obedience passes from the eye of a king, at his death, he loses therewith his authority over his subjects. I now see thee in thy true colours. As the sole survivor of my knights thou shouldst be as dutiful to me as all the other knights combined ; but instead of that thou wishest to deceive me in order to obtain possession of the costly sword, either for greed or for the stupid love of sensuous pleasure. However, it is possible that a man may fail in his duty twice, and the third time may successfully perform it ; hence I command thee to go again. But if thou omittest to throw away the sword this time, I will kill you with my own hands."

132—146.—Bedivere immediately rose and ran towards the shore, where he jumped down into the bulrush beds, grasped the sword, firmly in his hands, swung it over his head, and threw it. The sword sent out a succession of brilliant flashes in the moonlight as it was swung over the head, and as it darted through the air it formed a huge curve of light and shot like one of the rays of the *Aurora Borealis* darting across the northern horizon—a phenomenon sometimes visible in the Arctic regions, where huge icebergs collide against each other and the shock of the collision is mingled with the roar of the Arctic Sea. The fall of Excalibur was an unusually brilliant spectacle. But before the sword sank below the surface, a mysterious arm clothed in white samite appeared above it, caught the sword, waved it three times in the air, and then disappeared below. Bedivere then went back to the king.

147—160—Arthur then said to Bedivere : “ I can now clearly infer from your looks that the task is done. Let me know what you have seen or heard.” Bedivere replied : “ I had my eyes closed when I threw the sword, lest the sight of the precious stones should tempt me to fail in my duty, for I never saw nor shall ever see, either in this country or in any other, till my death, not even if I live three times the average length of human life, a thing of such surpassingly wonderful beauty as the hilt of that sword. Then, using as much force as I could, and after swinging it round my head, I threw him. But when I opened my eyes again, what should I see but a mysterious arm clothed in white samite that caught it by the hilt, waved it three times, and then disappeared with it below the surface of the lake.”

161—165 —Arthur rejoined : “ My end is fast approaching, and I should now be removed from this place to the margin of the lake. Prepare yourself to carry me on your shoulders to the brink of the mere. I am afraid my wound has caught numbness, and I shall die before I reach the lake.”

166—174—So saying, Arthur tried to rise from the floor, and with great difficulty put himself in a recumbent posture, staring with looks like those of a painted portrait. Bedivere gazed at him sorrowfully with his eyes full of tears. He was too much overpowered by emotion to be able to speak. Then he threw

himself on one knee, pulled the king tenderly by the arms over his back, and rising up carried him through the churchyard.

175—191.—As he was being carried to the lake, king Arthur breathed very heavily, like one who is oppressed by a nightmare in his sleep when all the house is silent. Slowly and faintly he urged Bedivere to hasten on, for he feared it was already too late and that he might die before reaching the lake. Bedivere however had hopes of reaching the place in time, and walked on from crag to crag, his body casting a huge shadow on the frost-covered hills. He heard the roar of the Atlantic behind him and a cry in front. The remorse he felt for his disobedience and the fear that the king might suddenly die, perpetually urged him on. As he walked among the hills the clanking of his armour echoed among the cliffs. At last he reached the lake and beheld with wonder the long pathways of light formed by the moonlight across the smooth surface of the lake.

192—202. On coming within sight of the lake they say that a dark-coloured boat was waiting for them at the brink, and on approaching near they could observe that the decks were thickly crowded with dark figures, completely clothed in black, beside whom there sat three Queens wearing gold crowns. These burst out into a loud lamentation that resembled the shrill howling of the wind in some utterly desolate place that has never been frequented by human beings since the creation of the world.

203—224.—Arthur asked the knight to place him in the boat, and this was done. The three Queens received him in the boat with open arms, and wept. But the tallest and most beautiful of them laid his head upon her lap, unfastened his head-piece, rubbed his hands warm, called him by his name, lamented loudly and wept over him at seeing his condition. For his face was bloodless and pale, like the moon when its light is fading before the early rays of the rising sun; his armour was all spotted over with marks of blood that had flowed from wounds he had received in battle; his beautiful locks of hair, that used to lend glory to his face when he sat on his throne placed high on a platform, were embrowned with dust, or gathered into knots and hanging loosely over his face so that they were mixed with his beard. Altogether he looked a complete wreck of his former greatness and his former glory. He was no longer the Arthur he was before, no longer the most brilliant of all the knights assembled in the

tournaments held at Camelot, where he was the wonder of the spectators.

225—237. — Bedivere mourned aloud : “ Alas, my lord, what will become of me now that you are going ? Life for me is no longer worth living, for it seems now that the golden age of chivalry is past, when every day some opportunity or other of righting the wrongs of the people presented itself to us, and every such opportunity gave a knight the chance of distinguishing himself. There was never such a rule of Right in the world except at the birth of Christ. But now the order of the Round Table which was made to embrace all nationalities is completely broken up, and I, the last survivor, am destined to pass the remainder of my life in misery, among strangers and unsympathetic companions.”

238—263. — Arthur answered from the boat in a low voice : “ Customs and institutions are constantly being supplanted by fresh ones, and God has many methods of carrying out His great purposes, and is frequently relinquishing worn-out methods and adopting new ones, lest the too long continuance of the same institutions, however beneficial they might originally have been, should cause stagnation and be productive of evil. You must find consolation for yourself as best you can : I have no means of consoling you. My career is over, and may God accept my humble services, recognise them as His own, and purify them of all evil elements ! But if you never see me any more, pray that God may grant peace to my spirit. People in general do not fully realise the marvellous efficacy of prayer : prayer can do many things for man which he erroneously supposes to be beyond its power. Be you therefore constantly praying for me. Without prayer men are in no degree higher in the rank of creation than lower animals, who are guided only by instinct and have consciousness only of what they can perceive by sense. It is the faculty of recognising God that makes man rank above the brute world. Mere *knowledge* of God is not, however, sufficient ; it must be combined with *prayer* to God both for their own selves and for those who are near and dear to them. Prayer thus constitutes a beautiful link between God and His creatures, who are entirely dependent on His mercy in every little detail of their lives. But now farewell, I am going with these people to the distant island-valley of Avilion—but I am not quite sure that I am really going, for everything pertaining to me seems uncertain and

unknown. There the weather is delightful in all seasons of the year. The place is beautifully situated in a valley surrounded by rich meadows, green lawns, and shady hollows fringed by the clear calm water of the sea. I shall there take rest till my wound heals.

264—271.—As the king finished his speech, the boat left the shore, towed by boatmen and at the same time sailing with the help of the wind. As the white sails were puffed out by the wind, the boat looked like a swan with its breast stretched out swimming in the water. Bedivere stood on the margin for a long time, thinking of a great many events of the past, and continued gazing till the boat looked like a mere speck and the cries were heard no longer.

272—276.—But when the cry died away entirely, there followed a silence which, partly owing to contrast and partly owing to its being a winter dawn, was awe inspiring. Bedivere sighed audibly: 'The king is gone'; and as he said so, he was reminded of Merlin's prophecy about Arthur's origin and end—'From the great deep to the great deep he goes'.

277—287.—Bedivere then turned back and climbed up to the top of the highest ledge of rock, and from there he observed the dark boat moving yet, and he said to himself; "He is going to reign as king of the next world, and after recovering from his wound he will come back to earth. But it grieves me to think of the possibility of his never coming again. Alas, were these three Queens in the boat who were weeping over Arthur the same as we saw on the day of his coronation, when surrounded by a halo of light they stood silently in front of his throne, his friends who should help him in necessity?"

288—292.—Then from the East sounds were heard as faint as though they came from the other side of the world, sounds so faint that they were scarcely audible, but distinguishable as sounds of rejoicing, like those which greet a king when he returns home in triumph.

293—300.—Hearing these sounds, Bedivere climbed up still higher, the very highest he could climb, and using his utmost effort to discern the boat, saw it, or imagined that he saw it, moving down the lake to the sea, gradually becoming more and more imperceptible, till nothing could be seen except the light of the sun filling the atmosphere. A new cycle then began with the new day that dawned in the East.

## APPENDIX II

### ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS.

#### I

" So all day long the noise of battle roll'd  
Among the mountains by the winter sea,  
Until king Arthur's table, man by man,  
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their lord,  
King Arthur.

" These lines are evidently intended as a sort of recapitulation of the preceding portion of the poem, summing up and dismissing it in order that our attention may be concentrated upon the last scene which follows, and to which the preceding portion is merely an introduction. Moreover they are intended to give time to the reader to draw breath after the battle scene."

—*Elsdale*

#### II

" A broken chancel with a broken cross."

" The broken chapel is perhaps the symbol of the defeat of Christianity in the battle against paganism."

Notice the fitness in carrying the king to a *ruined* chapel—his fate is as broken as the church, and his lifework is a ruin like the ruin to which he is conveyed in his last moments. Tennyson is always careful of these dramatic proprieties, and this little touch is all his own,—Malory merely says that ' Arthur was taken to a little chapel not far from the sea-side.'

#### III

" That s'ood on a dark strait of barren land :  
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one  
Lay a great water, and the moon was full."

" The epithets ' broken,' ' dark,' and ' barren ' serve to heighten the effect of the picture. What a noble background to set off the death of a king with whom departed civilization and religion ! "

—*Brimley*

"We may find a hidden allegory in all this. The 'ocean' is that vast unlimited eternity to which the life of the king was about to pass. The 'narrow strait' is the passage from the one to the other; and the 'great water' may be taken as the king's past life."

## IV

"Though Merlin aware that I should come again  
To rule once more."

"There is an allegory in these lines too. Arthur's present rule ends because it has not been without crime or without sin. This was the just dispensation of God, but this was not the final overthrow, because Merlin had prophesied that the future reign of Arthur would be without sin."

## V

"The many-knotted water flags  
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge."

"The many-knotted water-flags are not brought in simply to hide Excalibur: they must add their life to the picture and 'whistle stiff and dry about the marge.' Everywhere the phenomenon is presented with the utmost vividness and truth of appearance, with the utmost fulness of sense-impressing qualities."

—*Brimley*

## VI

"So strode he back slow to the wounded king."

"An instance of Tennyson's representative rhythm. The line too labours, and the verse moves slow, every word being accented, the line becomes heavy and slow to pronounce, and as such describes to the ear the slow movement of Sir Bedivere, whose heart was heavy for having acted against his conscience. Mark how he comes back *lightly*, when his heart is light as air for having triumphed over evil and discharged his duty."

## VII

"And if indeed I cast the brand away  
etc., etc."

"The abrupt beginning of the speech shows that his words are a continuation of a long process of silent thought."

The sophistries of Bedivere admirably illustrate the process of self-deception by which we so often persuade ourselves that wrong is right."

## VIII

"Nine years she wrought it."

"*Nine* is a mystic number. There were *nine* orders of angels; *nine* muses; *nine* rivers in Hell, etc., etc."

## IX

"Authority forgets a dying king."

"How thoroughly Shakespearean is King Arthur's lament, where the personification assists the imagination without distressing the understanding, as when dwelt upon and expanded in detail; deepening the impressiveness of the sentiment by giving along with a true thought a grand picture, just such a passing flash of impassioned rhetoric as would become the highest oratory and thrill through the hearts of a great assembly."

—*Brimley.*

## X

"Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,  
And leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged  
Among the bulrush beds."

"In the description of Sir Bedivere's last and successful attempt to throw the sword into the lake every word tells of rapid, agitated, determined action, refusing to dally with the temptation that had twice overcome him."

## XI

"Shot like a streamer off the northern morn,  
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
By night etc."

"Mark the condensed language. An inferior artist would have shouted through a page and emptied a whole pallet of colour without any result but interrupting the narrative, where Tennyson in three lines strikingly illustrates the fact he has to tell, associates it impressively with one of nature's grandest phenomena, and gives a complete picture of this phenomenon besides."

—*Brimley.*

## XII

"Now see I by thine eyes that this is done."

"How dramatic and striking is King Arthur's sudden exclamation on Sir Bedivere's return! We are made to realise in a moment both Sir Bedivere's looks, and the relief which obedience has brought to his perplexed mind, and also the figure of the dying king gazing up at him expectantly with searching eyes."

—*Brimley.*

## XIII

"Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern."

The simile suggests that the passing of Arthur in the barge corresponds to what would have been his funeral had he been an ordinary mortal.

## XIV

"Like wind that shrills

"All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
Or hath come, since the making of the world."

"The passage may seem at first to add nothing to the force of the comparison, as the shrillness of the wind would not be greater in an uninhabited place than anywhere else in open ground. But the mournfulness of the feeling a man would experience in such a place, from the sense of utter desolation and sterility, is blended with the naturally sad wail of the wind over a wide waste, and the addition thus becomes no mere completion of a thought of which only part is wanted for the illustration, but gives a heightening of sentiment without which the illustration would be incomplete and less impressive."

—*Brimley.*

## XV

"Three Queens with crowns of gold."

"The three Queens typify the three cardinal Christian virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, which help the soul in its battle against evil."

—*Stopford Brooke.*

## XVI

"Not like that Arthur who with lance in rest,  
From spur to plume a star of tournament."

Notice the four similes—(1) of the withered moon ; (2) of the rising sun ; (3) of the shattered column ; and (4) of the shooting star—pictures of faded splendour and decay alternated with pictures of radiant splendour and glory. The moon fading in the early morning, the dazzling brightness of the rising sun, the shattered column, the glancing flight of a shooting star, bring before the mind not only the dying king, pale and bleeding, but the contrast between his present weakness and the glory and triumphs of his chivalrous and brilliant life. In a few lines his story is told ; it is not merely a dying warrior who lies before us, but the strength, the state, the splendour and enjoyment of his past life, flash before the imagination, and deepen the sadness and humiliation of his defeat and death."

—*Brimley.*

## XVII

Arthur's farewell speech, ll. 239-263.

Arthur's speech may be analysed as follows :—

1. *Arthur comforts Bedivere by explaining to him the meaning and necessity of change*—Bedivere has been lamenting the bitter change that has come over his life by the dissolution of the Round Table. Arthur bids him take comfort in spite of the dreariness of the outlook. He bids him remember that change is part of the divine plan and is most necessary for the growth of mankind. Circumstances may alter, but Providence remains the same.

2. *He indicates the source of his own comfort.*—He had himself lamented the ruin of his life. But now he finds comfort in the thought that he is in God's hands, and that God will accept his imperfect work as the best he had to offer, and will, by accepting it, make it perfect.

3. *He lays a last duty on Bedivere.*—The king's work is done, but for Bedivere there still remains the duty of constant prayer for his lord. Let him take comfort in praying for Arthur. Not only can prayer accomplish more than men

imagine, but it is prayer alone which lifts man above the level of brute beasts, and forms a chain that links Earth to Heaven.

4. *He tells Bedivere of the heaven whither he is going.*— Let Bedivere also take comfort in the thought that his lord is going to a beautiful haven of rest, the island-valley of Avilion, where he will be healed of his wound.

"The unselfishness of Arthur's farewell is striking. His last words may at first seem somewhat too didactic, but their underlying motive is not to teach a lesson, but to impart comfort to the faithful knight left behind in solitude."

"The meaning of life seems at last clear to Arthur. The agony of doubt which has assailed him is over. He had felt a bitter sense of failure, a bitter sense of the fruitlessness of virtuous endeavour, and he had not understood how it was consistent with Divine Providence that after a life spent in waging God's wars he should pass and die amid the ruin of his work. Now something of the meaning of it all comes home to him. He realises that change is necessary to progress, that even a good system must pass away lest it should become a source of unhealthy stagnation, and that even when what is good passes away it is replaced by a new order of things which is equally part of the Divine Plan."

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## APPENDIX III

### FIGURES OF SPEECH

*N. B.*—The examples are not exhaustive.

1. **Metaphor**—

- (i) From spur to plume a *star* of tournament. (222)
- (ii) And bowery hollows *crowned* with summer sea. (262)

2. **Simile**—

- (i) Shot like a streamer of the northern morn, etc.  
(138)
- (ii) So like a shattered column lay the King. (220)
- (iii) Let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day. (248)

3. **Personification**—

- (i) And fling *him* far into the middle mere. (36)
- (ii) *Authority* forgets a dying king. (120)

4. **Hyperbole** (or exaggeration)—

A cry that shivered to the tingling stars. (198)

5. **Metonymy** (sign for the thing signified)—

- (i) Smote by the fresh beams of the springing *east*. (213)
- (ii) Then from the *dawn* it seemed there came. (288)

6. **Alliteration**—

- (i) Sea-wind sang shrill.
- (ii) Summer sea.

7. **Anacoluthon** (sudden change of construction)—

And after healing of his grievous wound  
He comes again ; but—if he come no more—  
O me, be yon dark Queens in yon black boat,  
etc., etc. (281-283)

## APPENDIX IV

### MODEL CONTEXTS

## 1

## Lines 13—47

The battle between King Arthur and his nephew Modred lasted all day, until all the knights of the Round Table except Sir Bedivere were killed. Seeing the wound of the king was mortal, Bedivere took him to a neighbouring chapel, situated on a piece of land between the Atlantic and a large lake. Here Arthur addressed Bedivere in these words:—

## 2

## Lines 38—43

Feeling his wound to be mortal, Arthur asks Bedivere to take his sword Excalibur and fling it into the lake. But Bedivere raises the objection that it is not proper to leave him in that condition, though he would obey his command.

## 3

## Lines 87—108

When mortally wounded Arthur asked Bedivere to take his sword Excalibur and fling it into the lake. Bedivere instead of throwing it hid it among the grass on the bank and reported a lie to the king. But the latter guessed the lie and rebuked him for the false statement. He then pardoned Bedivere and sent him again with the same order.

## 4

## Lines 135—145

Instead of throwing Excalibur into the lake as ordered by Arthur, Bedivere hid it and told a lie to the king. He was rebuked by the king and again sent on the same mission, but he again failed to do his duty. He was once more sent on the same errand, when he quickly threw the sword away, without giving any opportunity to his mind being biassed by the sight of it.

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APPENDIX V  
MODEL QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS  
A.—GENERAL.

I. What is Tennyson's version of the story of Arthur's death ? Give a summary of the events related in the ' Morte d' Arthur.'

**Ans.**—King Arthur had founded an order of knighthood, called the Round Table. One of these knights, Lancelot, seduced the Queen, and when the king went after him, another of his knights, named Modred, who was the king's own nephew, raised a revolt and had himself crowned king. Arthur pursued the usurper into Wales, where on the coast of Lyonesse he fought an indecisive battle with the insurgents. At the close of it, he rushed at Modred and killed him, but in doing so himself received a mortal wound.

II. On what authority does Tennyson profess to base his version of the story ?

**Ans.**—On the authority of Sir Bedivere, the first knight of the order of the Round Table founded by King Arthur, and also the last survivor of that order. This knight faithfully served the king to the last

III. Arthur's death is represented as having been foretold to him in a dream : do you know of any other instances when similar prophecies were made to great men ?

**Ans.**—Yes—(1) a similar vision appeared to Saul at Endor before his last battle and death ;

(2) the ghost of Cæsar appeared to Brutus before the battle of Philippi ;

(3) the spirits of the Norman Saints appeared to Harold before the battle of Senlac.

IV. When and where was Arthur's Last Battle fought ?

**Ans.**—It was fought on the western coast of Lyonesse, on mid-winter day,—' that day when the great light of heaven burn'd at his lowest in the rolling year'.

## V. How does Tennyson describe Lyonesse ?

**Ans**—Tennyson describes Lyonesse as a tract of country raised up from the bottom of the sea by geological forces, and formerly forming part of the mainland, but now again submerged. It was anciently peopled by remnants of a prehistoric race of men, now extinct. The place was full of mountains which stretched upto the sea coast.

## VI. In what manner did Arthur come by his famous sword ?

**Ans.**—One summer noon, as Arthur was rowing, an arm, clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, rose up above the surface of the lake, holding the sword. The king rowed across, and took the sword.

## VII. With what arguments does Bedivere persuade himself to disobey the king ?

**Ans.**—(1) The throwing of the sword means the loss of a most remarkable thing.

(2) If preserved, it would be an object of delight to beholders

(3) No good at all will come out of throwing it away.

(4) No harm at all will come out of not throwing it away.

(5) If the sword is thrown away, no material and palpable relic of Arthur will remain for posterity.

(6) It is true that disobedience is detrimental to good government, but obedience is not our duty in all cases. The king is in no condition to realize the consequences of his orders.

## VIII. With what comparisons does Tennyson describe—

(a) the fall of Excalibur into the mere ;

(b) the lamentation of the three Queens who received Arthur in the boat ;

(c) the colour of Arthur's face as he lay in the boat ;

(d) Arthur's body as he lay in the boat ;

(e) the efficacy of prayer ;

(f) the sailing away of the boat ;

(g) the sounds proceeding from the east as Arthur's boat disappeared below the horizon.

**Ans.**—(a) The sword darted through the air like one of the rays of the *Aurora Borealis*, a phenomenon sometimes seen in the Arctic regions, where huge icebergs collide against one another, and the shock of the collision is mingled with the roar of the Arctic Ocean.

(b) The lamentation of the Queens was like the moaning sound made by the wind in a desolate region, where no one comes, or has come since the creation of the world.

(c) The colour of Arthur's face is compared to the faded brilliance of the moon at break of day.

(d) Arthur as he lay in the boat is compared to a shattered column.

(e) Prayer is compared to a fountain, and men who do not pray to sheep or goats.

(f) The boat as it sailed away is compared to a full-breasted swan, that singing a sweet song just before its death, ruffles its white feathers and swims away.

(g) These sounds are compared to the sounds with which the inhabitants of a city welcome a king when he returns home in triumph from a war.

#### IX. How does Tennyson describe Avilion?

**Ans**—The valley of Avilion is situated on an island abundantly supplied with natural beauties, such as deep meadows, beautiful lawns, pleasant gardens, shady hollows, and tranquil sea surrounding it. The weather is delightful in all seasons of the year. there is no wind, no rain, no hail, no snow.

#### X. What do you know of Modred?

**Ans**—He was the nephew, *i.e.*, sister's son, of King Arthur. He hated Sir Lancelot, sowed discord amongst the knights of the Round Table, and carried on intrigues with the "lords of the White Horse," the brood left by Hengist. When the king went north to chastise Sir Lancelot for seducing the queen, he left Modred in charge of the kingdom. Modred raised a revolt, and the king was slain in his attempt to quash it. Modred himself was slain by the king.

XI. Give a short history of king Arthur.

**Ans.**—King Arthur was an ancient British hero of the sixth century. He was the son of Uther Pendragon and the princess Igera, wife of Gorloise, Duke of Cornwall. He married Guinevere, established the famous order of Round Table, and reigned, surrounded by a splendid court, for twelve years in peace. After this, as tradition says, he conquered Denmark, Norway, and France, slew the giants of Spain, and went to Rome. From thence he is said to have hastened home, on account of the faithlessness of his wife, and of Modred, his nephew, who had stirred up his subjects to rebellion. He subdued the rebels, but died in consequence of his wounds, on the island of Avalon.

XII. How far is the legendary account of Arthur trustworthy from the historical point of view?

**Ans.**—The story of Arthur is supposed to have some foundation in fact, and has ever been a favourite subject with romanticists and poets. It is generally believed that Arthur was one of the last great Celtic chiefs who led his country men from the west of England to resist the settlement of the Saxons in the country. But many authorities regard him as a leader of the Cymry of Cumbria and Strath-clyde against the Saxon invaders of the east coast, and the Picts and Scots north of the Forth and the Clyde.

XIII. Give a short account of the Round Table.

**Ans.**—The Round Table, famous in the Arthurian legends, was a table for the accommodation of a select fraternity of knights, said to have been established by Uther Pendragon, father of King Arthur, and, when it was complete, to have had 160 knights of approved valour and virtue. King Leodigrance who received it from Uther Pendragon, was father of Guinevere, and assigned it as part of her dowry when she married Arthur. The fellowship of the Round Table met for the last time just before setting out on the quest of the Holy Grail.

There are other accounts of the founding of the Table, one of which ascribes it to Arthur himself, who admitted only 12 knights to it. All, however, agree in describing it as the centre of a fellowship of valiant, pious, and noble knights.

**B.—EXPLANATORY.**

**I. Explain the following passages in connection with the context :—**

- (a) What record, or what relic of my lord  
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath  
And rumours of a doubt ?
- (b) Authority forgets a dying king,  
Laid widowed of the power in his eye  
That bow'd the will.
- (c) The old order changeth yielding place to new,  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
- (d) For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?

**ANSWERS.**

(a)

**Context :—**

Arthur had received a mortal wound from the sword of Modred just before he struck him dead. When he felt death to be near, he asked Bedivere to take his miraculous sword, Excalibur, and fling it into the lake. But when Bedivere saw the beauty of the richly-studded hilt, he was tempted to steal it, and concealing the sword among some water-plants, went back to the king and told him a lie. Arthur could find out from his account of what he had seen near the lake that his order had not been carried out, and he was sent back on the task. Bedivere could not still overcome the temptation and he argued within himself on the propriety of preserving it, saying :—

**Explanation :—**

If this sword is thrown away, no material and palpable relic of the king will descend to posterity, but only vague rumours and uncertain reports.

(b)

**Context :—**

When Arthur felt his death to be approaching, he ordered Bedivere to take his sword, Excalibur, and fling it into the lake. Bedivere was tempted by the sight of the richly-studded hilt, and twice tried to deceive the king by merely hiding it among the plants growing on the margin. On the third occasion, when he again told a lie, the king was in a rage and bitterly exclaimed :

**Explanation :—**

When the commanding looks that inspire awe in the subject and impel him to obedience, disappear from the face of a king at the time of his death, he loses therewith his power over his subjects.

**Notes :—**

Authority is here personified.

(c)

**Context :—**

When Arthur was sailing away to the island-valley of Avilion, Bedivere mourned for him saying that he was destined to spend the remainder of his life in misery among new companions. Arthur tried to console him by saying :—

**Explanation :**

"It is a great and universal truth that customs and institutions, after they have existed for a time, perish and are replaced by new ones. Such change is absolutely necessary for the progress of the world, for the unduly long continuance of an institution, however beneficial it might originally have been, causes stagnation and becomes a source of positive evil.

(d)

**Context :—**

When Arthur was sailing away to the island-valley of Avilion Bedivere mourned for him, saying that he was destined to spend the remainder of his life in misery among new and unsympathetic companions. Arthur tried to console him by pointing out the necessity of change in human institutions and the importance of prayer in human life. About the last he said :—

**Explanation :—**

"Without prayer men are in no respect higher in the rank of creation than lower animals, who are conscious of nothing except what they can perceive by material sense or instinct. It is the faculty of knowing God that raises mankind above the level of brutes. But mere *knowledge* of God is not sufficient ; it must be combined with prayer both for their own sakes and those near and dear to them."

**II. Explain the following simile noting the points of comparison :—**

And flashing round and whirled in an arch,  
 Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,  
 Seen where the moving isles of winter shock  
 By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.  
 So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur.

**Ans.**—See *Notes*.

**III. Explain the allusions in the following :—**

- (a) The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
 Whereof this world holds record.
- (b) Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men.
- (c) Such times have been not since the light that led  
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
- (d) On that high day, when, clothed with living light,  
 They stood before his throne.

**Ans.**—(a) This refers to the order of knighthood founded by King Arthur, and called the Round Table.

(b) This refers to the "Danish barrows" or mounds of earth marking the burial-places of the old Danish invaders of Britain.

(c) This refers to the birth of Christ, on which occasion the Magi or Wise Men betook themselves to Bethlehem and offered myrrh and frankincense to the new-born babe.

(d) This refers to the coronation of King Arthur, who was on that day, encircled by a bright group, of whom these three queens formed part.

## IV. Explain :—

- (a) From the great deep to the great deep he goes.
- (b) Obedience is the bond of rule.
- (c) Authority forgets a dying king.

**Ans.**—(a) Arthur's origin is as mysterious as his end.

(b) Obedience is what keeps a government firm; disobedience tends to bring about anarchy.

(c) A dying king is freely disobeyed by his subjects.

## C.—GRAMMATICAL.

## I. Parse the italicised words in the following :—

- (a) Reels back into the *beast* and is no more.
- (b) Wail their *way*.
- (c) This *heard* the bold Sir Bedivere and spake.
- (d) And *they* my knights who loved me once, the stroke—

That strikes them dead is as my death to me.

- (e) Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a *fight*.
- (f) *Dry* clashed his harness in the icy caves.

**Ans.**—(a) Concrete noun used as abstract=beastliness.

(b) Cognate accusative to 'wail.'

(c) Verb to the nominative 'Sir Bedivere.'

(d) Pendent nominative in sense, in apposition with 'them' in the next line.

(e) Cognate object to 'fought.'

(f) Adverb modifying 'clashed.'

## II. Express the following in indirect speech :—

- (a) "The sequel of day unsolders all  
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights  
....."

Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word."

(ll. 13-37)

**Ans** —Arthur mourned over the sequel of that day which he said unsoldered the goodliest fellowship of famous knights whose record is held by this world. He lamented over the death of his men whom he loved. He regretted that they would never again in future delight their souls with talk of Knightly deeds, while walking about the gardens and halls of Camelot, as they were used to do in former days. He again regretted that his death had been caused by the same people whom he had made. In spite of what Merlin had sworn about Arthur's coming again to rule once more in future, the latter felt sure that he was so deeply smitten through the helm that without help he could not last till the following morning. He therefore ordered Bedivere to take Excalibur which was his pride, and then asked him if he remembered how in former days, one summer noon, an arm had risen up from out the bosom of the lake, clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, holding the sword—how he had rowed across and taken it and had worn it ever since like a king. He expresses his conviction that in aftertime wherever his name would be remembered this incident would also be related. Bedivere was then ordered not to delay but to take the sword and fling it into the middle of the mere, and bring him word of what he saw.

(b) "It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,

Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word'

(ll. 39—43).

Bedivere at first expresses his unwillingness to leave the king alone, aidless, and wounded in the head, for he said a little thing might harm a wounded man. Nevertheless he expressed his willingness to obey his command to the word,

(c) "Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,

I bade thee, watch, and lightly bring me word."

(ll. 72—80)

King Arthur rebuked Sir Bedivere by saying that he had betrayed his nature and name in not telling the truth, which befitted his fealty, and which he ought to have done like a true knight. He was quite certain that Bedivere's statement was false, for surer signs would have followed, either a hand or voice would have been raised or at least a motion of the mere. He expressed his shame for men who lie, and then pardoning him, for he was dear to him, ordered him again on the same mission.

[THE END.]

